

In Another World With My Smartphone

23

Patora Fuyuhara
illustration • Eiji Usatsuka



Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
 Chapter I: Father & Daughter.....	11
 Chapter II: That's My Chivalrous Girl	37
 Chapter III: The Twins and Their Daughters	73
 Chapter IV: Kids in the Park	146
 Chapter V: The Cook's Daughter	214
Afterword	240
Bonus Short Stories.....	241
The Five Princesses	241
Mothers & Daughters	243
Crafting Games	246

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**“WELL, WHEN
I WOKE UP,
I WAS AT A
SMALL VILLAGE
SOUTH OF HERE!
THEY SAID
BANDITS COME
AND TAKE THEIR
FOOD EVERY
MONTH. ISN'T
THAT AWFUL?
SO I FIGURED
I'D COME AND
DESTROY 'EM!”**



A FAMILY TRIP TO THE THEME PARK!

An anime-style illustration of two young girls with light blue hair and green eyes, dressed as maids in white dresses with green aprons and bows. They are standing behind a table laden with various dishes, including cakes, salads, and a roasted bird. The girl on the left is smiling and looking towards the viewer, while the girl on the right is looking down at a glowing orange energy ball she is holding. The background is a vibrant, fiery orange and red. The text "HOH..." is written in green, stylized letters with a yellow outline, positioned between the two girls. The text "I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW, MOTHER... THAT I HAPPEN TO BE A PHENOMENAL COOK. I MIGHT EVEN HAVE SURPASSED MOST HOUSEWIVES OUT THERE..." is written in blue, stylized letters with a white outline, positioned to the right of the girl on the right. The text "Lu's eyes narrowed. There was a clear competitive atmosphere." is written in black, stylized letters with a white outline, positioned to the left of the girl on the left.

“HOH...”

**“I’LL HAVE
YOU KNOW,
MOTHER...
THAT
I HAPPEN
TO BE A
PHENOMENAL
COOK.
I MIGHT
EVEN HAVE
SURPASSED
MOST
HOUSEWIVES
OUT THERE...”**

**Lu’s eyes
narrowed.
There was a clear
competitive
atmosphere.**

Character Profiles



Elze Silhoueska

One of Touya's wives. The elder of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. A ferocious melee fighter, she makes use of gauntlets in combat. Her personality is fairly to-the-point and blunt. She can make use of Null fortification magic, specifically the spell **[Boost]**. She loves spicy foods.



Yumina Urnea Belfast

One of Touya's wives. Princess of the Belfast Kingdom. She was twelve years old in her initial appearance, and her eyes are heterochromatic. The right is blue, while the left is green. She has mystic eyes that can discern the true character of an individual. She has three magical aptitudes: Earth, Wind, and Darkness. She's also extremely proficient with a bow and arrow. She fell in love with Touya at first sight.



Mochizuki Touya

A highschooler who was accidentally murdered by God. He's a no-hassle kind of guy who likes to go with the flow. He's not very good at reading the atmosphere, and typically makes rash decisions that bite him in the ass. His mana pool is limitless, he can flawlessly make use of every magical element, and he can cast any Null spell that he wants. He's currently the Grand Duke of Brunhild.



Sushie Urnea Ortlinde

One of Touya's wives. She was ten years old in her initial appearance. Her nickname is Sue. The niece of Belfast's king, and Yumina's cousin. Touya saved her from being attacked on the road. She has an innocently adventurous spirit.



Lucia Leah Regulus

One of Touya's wives. The Third Princess of the Regulus Empire, she's Yumina's age. She fell in love with Touya when he saved her during a coup. She likes to fight with twin blades, and she's on good terms with Yumina.



Kokonoe Yae

One of Touya's wives. A samurai girl from the far eastern land of Eashen, a country much like Japan. She tends to repeat herself and speak formally, she does. Yae is quite a glutton, eating more than most normal people would dare touch. She's a hard worker, but can sometimes slack off. Her family runs a dojo back in Eashen, and they take great pride in their craft. It's not obvious at first, but her boobs are pretty big.



Linze Silhoueska

One of Touya's wives. The younger of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. She wields magic, specifically from the schools of Light, Water, and Fire. She finds talking to people difficult due to her own shy nature, but she is known to be surprisingly bold at times. Rumors say she might be the kind of girl who enjoys male on male romance... She loves sweet foods.



Paula

A stuffed toy bear animated by years upon years of the **[Program]** spell. She's the result of two-hundred years of programmed commands, making her seem like a fully aware living being. Paula... Paula's the worst!



Sakura

A mysterious girl Touya rescued in Eashen. She had lost her memories, but has now finally gotten them back. Her true identity is Farnese Forneus, daughter of the Xenoahs Overlord. Currently living a peaceful life in Brunhild, and she has joined the ranks of Touya's wives.



Leen

One of Touya's wives. Former Clan Matriarch of the Fairies, she now serves as Brunhild's Court Magician. She claims to be six-hundred-and-twelve years old, but looks tremendously young. She can wield every magical element except Darkness, meaning her magical proficiency is that of a genius. Leen is a bit of a light-hearted bully.



Hildegard Minas Lestia

One of Touya's wives. First Princess of the Knight Kingdom Lestia. Her swordplay talents earned her a reputation as a 'Knight Princess'. Touya saved her life when she was attacked by a group of Phrase, and she's loved him ever since. She's a good friend of Yae, and she stammers a bit when flustered.



Luli

The fourth of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Azure Monarch, the ruler of dragons. She often clashes with Kohaku due to her condescending personality.



Kougyoku

The third of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Flame Monarch, ruler of feathered things. Though her appearance is flashy and extravagant, she's actually quite cool and collected.



Sango and Kokuyou

The second of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. They are the Black Monarch, two in one. The rulers of scaled beasts. They can freely manipulate water. Sango is a tortoise, and Kokuyou is a snake. Sango is a female, and Kokuyou is a male (but he's very much a female at heart).



Kohaku

The first of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She's the White Monarch, the ruler of beasts, the guardian of the west and a beautiful White Tiger. She can create devastating shockwaves, and also change size at will.



High Rosetta

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Workshop, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Rosetta for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #27. For whatever reason, she's the most reliable of the bunch.



Francesca

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hanging Garden, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Cesca for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #23. She likes to tell very inappropriate jokes.



Mochizuki Moroha

The God of Swords. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She trains the and advises the knights of Brunhild. She's gallant and brave, but also a bit of an airhead at times.



Mochizuki Karen

The God of Love. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She stays in Brunhild because she says she needs to catch a servile god, but doesn't really do all that much in the way of hunting him. She's a total pain in the butt.



Pamela Noël

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Tower, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Noel for short and wears a jersey. Her Airframe Serial Number is #25. She sleeps all the time, and eats laying down. Her tremendous laziness means she doesn't do all that much.



Preliora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Rampart, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Liora for short and wears a blazer. Her Airframe Serial Number is #20. She's the oldest of the Babylon Gynoids, and would attend to the... Personal night-time needs of Doctor Babylon herself. She has no experience with men.



Fredmonica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hangar, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Monica for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #28. She's a funny little hard worker who has a bit of a casual streak. She's a good friend of Rosetta, and is the Gynoid with the most knowledge of the Frame Gears.



Bell Flora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Alchemy Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Flora for short and wears a nurse outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #21. A nurse with dangerously big boobs and even more dangerous medicines.



Doctor Regina Babylon

An ancient genius from a lost civilization, reborn into an artificial body that resembles a small girl. She is the "Babylon" that created the many artifacts and forgotten technologies scattered around the world today. Her Airframe serial number is #29. She remained in stasis for five-thousand years before finally being awakened.



Atlantica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Research Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Tica for short. Her Airframe serial number is #22. Of the Babylon Numbers, she is the one who best embodies Doctor Babylon's inappropriately perverse side.



Lileleparshe

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Storehouse, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Parshe for short and wears a shrine maiden outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #26. She's tremendously clumsy, even if she's just trying to help. The amount of stuff she ruins is troublingly high.



Irisfam

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Library, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Fam for short and wears a school uniform. Her Airframe Serial Number is #24. She's a total book fanatic and hates being interrupted when she's reading.

The Story So Far!

Mochizuki Touya, wielding a smartphone customized by God himself, continues to live his life in a newly formed double-world! The war against the Wicked God, which threatened the existence of two innocent worlds, has finally come to an end. Touya has emerged victorious, but at what cost? Now he's saddled with divine duties! Awakened to godliness! Our hapless young lad is to be caretaker of the newly-created world. Fortunately, things seem to be at peace. But could this only be a surface observation? The seeds of discord are sown out of sight, and chaos could very well burst from the dark... How will Touya fare in his new station? Only time will tell.

The Worlds of In Another World With My Smartphone World Map





Chapter I: Father & Daughter

“Now then, I’ll make my report,” Yumina began to speak. The grand duchesses of Brunhild were gathered for a tea party under the Babylon garden’s gazebo.

All nine of the Brunhild brides sat around the table. Each of them had a cup of tea in front of them, as well as a little plate with some cake.

“So far, two of our children from the future have arrived. Yae’s daughter, Yakumo, and Leen’s daughter, Quun. We only know Quun’s location, however. Yakumo’s currently out questing around the world.”

“Have we had any contact with her since the last time?”

“No... She does not realize how much her mother worries, she does not...” Yae angrily said as she munched on the cake in front of her. Unlike the others, she was eating an entire one rather than just a slice. She also had a second and third cake waiting in reserve. She was clearly eating more than usual due to stress, and she was already the kind of person who ate obscene amounts to begin with.

“Did we learn anything new from Quun?” Linze turned to Leen and asked. All the wives except Yumina leaned in with rapt curiosity.

“Not much, really. Unlike Allis, she’s rather tight-lipped.”

“We did hear a few...concerning things from her, though,” Hilde muttered, prompting Elze to nod along with her.

“That’s right! She said my kid’s a good kid, but then when I asked about me, she just giggled to herself! Isn’t that ominous?! What does it mean?!”

“I’m sure she did that on purpose. When I asked, she said my daughter, Frei, isn’t quite like me...but she refused to elaborate! It bothered me so much that I could barely focus on my training.”

Upon hearing out Elze and Hilde, Leen sighed and folded her arms.

“I must apologize for her behavior. She’s apparently having fun teasing us with what she knows. But she’s not lying, I know that much...so please just bear with her for now,” Leen said as she heaved a heavy sigh. There was no doubt that Quun was enjoying the reactions to the limited information she provided.

“She’s got such a terrible character... She must take after our darling, no?”

The prevalent thought at the table was that she took after her mother, but none of them admitted it. After all, they knew better than to speak ill of one another.

As if to clear the air, Lu suddenly spoke up with a smile, saying, “S-So, what’s Quun up to right now?”

“She’s currently visiting Allis. Or rather, I made her go visit Allis. When I left her to her own devices, she simply stayed up here on Babylon. Not exactly healthy for her development.”

Quun spent most of her time in Babylon, so she hadn’t really interacted with many people other than Leen and Touya.

“Has Allis let anything new slip?”

“I heard something from Mr. Mittens...”

Sue voiced a question, prompting Sakura to mutter a reply.

D’Artagnan, also known as Mr. Mittens, was Sakura’s summoned beast. He was in charge of all the cats in the castle town. Thus, Sakura was privy to a lot of the gossip and secrets from around the area.

Not every secret, though. Mr. Mittens categorized his information in one of three ways. Things to tell Sakura, things to tell the grand duke, and things to tell Tsubaki and the intelligence corps. Everything pertaining to Allis fell under the Sakura umbrella.

“Allis is with Quun at the moment. I’m having Mr. Mittens secretly record them.”

The other eight girls stood up and gathered around Sakura’s phone. The screen displayed the interior of a coffee shop. It was Parent, one of the most popular locations in town.

Mr. Mittens and his closest allies had their own mass-produced smartphones, which explained how he was currently sending a live feed to Sakura’s phone. The shot was definitely inside the cafe, but it looked as if the phone and its holder were underneath a table, given the darkness and the low angle of the shot. It was probably the best a cat could do.

Two girls were seated at a table within the frame. Both had silver-white hair, but one had it cut short, while the other had it tied up. They were, of course, Allis and Quun.

Mecha-Paula, or Parla, was sitting next to Quun.

“Mmm, this is yummy!”

“I’m glad this place’s food is just as delicious as it is in our time. Though, the menu selection is certainly less varied.”

Their voices were faint, but still audible. At the very least, there were no issues with the audio. Apparently, the future Brunhild still had this same cafe.

Allis was eating a strawberry parfait, while Quun gorged on a huge stack of pancakes with whipped cream and fruits.

“I’m glad you’re here, Quun. I didn’t bring much money...”

“My own finances are tied up in the future guild, so I didn’t bring any with me either.”

“Huh?! B-But what about the bill?! I-I already started eating!” Allis panicked and put down her spoon in response to Quun’s words. Half of her strawberry parfait was already gone.

Seeing the fear on Allis’s face, Quun couldn’t help but laugh.

“Don’t worry about it. I don’t have money, but... Parla?” Quun gave a nod of her head as she said that, prompting the bear Gollem to dispense a few silver coins. The machine was, in effect, a piggy bank.

“Man, sis! You tease people *way* too much! I was worried!”

“Hee hee hee... I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“...I do not think that is a compliment, I do not,” Yae, who was keenly watching the screen, muttered to herself. The audio was one-way, so none of the girls were worried about being heard.

“My daughter really does seem to be a problem child.”

“Leen-dono, have you not made fun of us in many similar situations in the past, have you not?”

“...Not that I recall, no,” Leen replied as she shifted her eyes away from Yae’s accusatory gaze. The girls had learned an idiom during their visit to Earth. It went something like, “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” Everyone other than Leen was thinking of it in that moment...though none dared say it.

“So, how come the others aren’t here? Why does Big Sis Yakumo have to train all the time?”

“I’m sure they’ll all gather here soon enough... Linne and Yoshino will probably get hungry before long, if they’re not already eating. Come to think of it, do they even have money?”

The nine brides all stared at each other in response to Quun's words. Yoshino. That was a name none of them had heard before, but it had to be one of their children.

"Uhhhm... Yae's daughter is Yakumo, Hilde's daughter is Frei...and Leen has Quun... My sister's daughter is Elna, and m-my d-daughter is Linne...right?" Linze listed off every child they knew about so far. Thus, Yoshino had to be either Yumina's, Sue's, Sakura's, or Lu's.

"That name sounds like one from Touya's original world."

"I-It is possible, it is. But there are many similarities between our husband's Japan and my own Eashen, there are. Yoshino may come from the Yoshino cherry."

"Yoshino cherry?"

"It is a type of cherry blossom, it is, that is also known as Yoshino Sakura..."

Yae's words made the girls turn to face the demonkin in their midst. Sakura stared quietly at the screen, a faint smile forming on her face. Eventually, she muttered the name to herself.

"That's a nice name. Hope she's a good girl..."

"It might be a bit too soon to declare she's your child, Sakura-dono..."

"She's mine. I'm sure of it..."

Undeterred by Yae's trepidation, Sakura gave a firm nod.

"My name comes from the Yaezakura, it does. It is a kind of cherry blossom as well, it is. She might be my second child—"

"Yae, don't be mean. Don't forget your own daughter's on the run."

"She is not on the run, she is not!" Yae exclaimed. She certainly hoped not, at least, but she did have a childhood memory of running away from her parents for a while. She wasn't as devoted to the

sword as her brother back then, and she found the training too harsh for her liking.

Yae sincerely hoped she wouldn't end up pushing her child in a similar manner. Sakura's words were almost like a slap in the face, but they served as a solemn reminder of the parenting style she wanted to avoid.

"I'm sure my siblings can make money somehow. Besides, Yoshino has **[Teleport]**, so she can just do whatever."

Quun's words made Sakura look away from the smartphone screen in order to cast a smug grin Yae's way. Though Null spells weren't normally inherited, Quun had **[Program]** just like her mother. It stood to reason that Yoshino might have inherited **[Teleport]** from Sakura.

"I kind of thought Arcia would come straight here, though."

"Huh?! Arcia?! I-Is that maybe my child?! My name's Lucia, right?! S-So, Arcia?! Lucia?! Arcia?! Y-Yumina, don't you agree?!"

"Y-Yeah... That might be it..." Yumina smiled stiffly.

Everyone sort of leaned away from Lu, who was in the middle of a freak-out. They understood how she felt, though.

"She's so attached to Dad that she might cause trouble when she gets here... I hope she doesn't fight her Mom, Lucia, in this era too..."

"Uh, what?"

Quun capped off her concerning sentence with a sigh. Lu's expression stiffened in response.

"Wh-What did she mean just now?!"

"Seems like you and that Arcia girl don't get along, Lu. Maybe she's all over Touya and thinks you're a pest, even if you're her mom?"

"E-E-Elze?! D-Don't say that! Th-That can't be right! No way!"

“A-Ah ha ha... S-Sorry. I-It was just a joke! I was just kidding!”

“That wasn’t funny!”

Linze jabbed Elze with her elbow, as if to chastise her sister. Lu’s high spirits were now gone, thoroughly replaced with anxiety.

“It’ll be fiiiiiiine! Arcia loves her mom! I’ll ask her to make some treats when she shows up.”

Lu couldn’t help but sigh in relief in response to what Allis said. Apparently, her relationship with her child wasn’t all hostile.

“Meowha?!”

“Huh?”

Mr. Mittens suddenly let out a strange noise, prompting all the girls watching the screen to raise their brows in confusion.

The camera suddenly shifted away from the two girls at the table, panning over to a closeup of Parla’s metallic face.

“Oh, we got caught...”

Right after Sakura said that, the video feed began violently shaking. Mr. Mittens dropped his phone. The camera now only showed the dark underside of the table. However, there was still audio.

“Meoooooow! Get outta here, Gollem! I’ll— Gyaaah!”

Lots of rattling and sparking sounds came through the feed, as well as the occasional flash of white light.



Eventually, the feed switched to something visible again. Someone had grabbed Mr. Mittens's phone.

The recording was switched to selfie mode, and the person visible on the screen was none other than Quun, who was grinning wide.

"Hello, mothers. Quite rude of you to peek, don't you think? Shouldn't you give your daughter the right to privacy?" Quun said that, then giggled once more before winking and cutting the feed off.

"Hrm... She has a point," Sakura sighed as she took her phone back from the table and switched it off. The girls all agreed that Quun was right. They shouldn't have tried to invade her personal space. They'd just gotten a little too worked up in their search for information.

"Guess she taught us a lesson this time, eh?" Leen clicked her tongue and muttered. The other eight girls sighed quietly. Though they'd been excited, the experience was sobering enough to snap them back to their senses.

◇ ◇ ◇

"My, what a fuss... Parla, take this little kitty back where he belongs."

Mr. Mittens had been downed by Parla's lightning blast, and now the little Gollem was hauling him off. Unlike Paula, Parla was capable of offensive tactics. She was limited to pacification, however. None of her abilities were lethal.

She toddled out of the cafe, carrying the unconscious feline atop her head.

"Jeez, we got filmed? I didn't say anything bad, did I?"

"It should be fine. Nothing we said would annoy Granny Tokie. The fact that she didn't stop us is proof enough."

“Mmm... Guess that’s fine, then. I wasn’t really listening when she explained stuff.”

“Sounds just like you...”

Allis let out a small laugh in response. Quun was briefly concerned about her friend’s lack of attentiveness, but she quickly reminded herself that the situation was fine.

“Do you think I’ll be able to see the jersey thread, though?”

“Hm? Oh...it’s a good thing you didn’t mention that while the camera was still recording, Allis... Good grief, you’re that set on my brother, are you?”

“H-Huh?! It’s not like that! Besides, he always compliments me by saying that I’m carefree and stuff!”

Quun wondered if that actually was a compliment, but she dared not speak her mind. Her brother was fairly blunt and honest, after all.

Allis was certainly carefree enough to not pay any heed to Granny Tokie’s warnings, that much was certain. Still, the fact that she’d brought up the jersey thread, of all things, surprised Quun, who could only marvel at how her friend’s mind worked. To prioritize something like that after absentmindedly tumbling back through time was something special indeed.

“Let’s try to avoid any unnecessary chatter for now, okay? Especially with your own father and mothers. I don’t want them leaking information to my father.”

“Okaaaay!” Allis smiled as she replied. Quun wasn’t so sure she could be trusted, but there was nothing to really do about it.

Granny Tokie had told them that the future wasn’t going to change, but when divinity came into play, it wasn’t a guarantee that the past would stay the same.

Throwing a pail of water into a river wasn't going to change it, since the water flowed in a predetermined path downstream. But if it rained heavily upstream, the water levels could rise, flooding the area.

Even if the possibility of such an abrupt upheaval was small, it was one they couldn't afford to overlook.

"...Whether or not it shows up doesn't matter much to me," Quun mumbled as she stuffed another piece of pancake into her mouth.

◇ ◇ ◇

"Touya, any idea what a jersey thread is?"

"...A jersey what?" Ende looked away from his fishing rod and asked me a question.

He and I were out on the dungeon islands, taking a little fishing trip in my sovereign territory.

Jersey thread? Do you knit jerseys? Those are like, clothes, right? I think Linze mentioned something like that once. Maybe he's asking about materials like wool or polyester?

"If you don't know, then whatever. Melle just heard something about it from Allis, so I got curious."

"Really? Man, I wonder what jerseys have to do with the future."

"Beats me. Oh, I got a bite."

Maybe sportswear gets real popular in the future? Guess Zanak could end up selling jerseys to adventurers or something. Kinda weird imagining an adventurer dressed up like that, though. Maybe it's good for ease of movement? But, uh... Hm, I dunno. If that's future fashion, then I'm not feeling it.

"Hup. Got one!" I exclaimed as I reeled in the fish using the rod we'd made in the workshop. A fish resembling a mackerel broke through the water. I unhooked it around the mouth and tossed the flopping

fish into a nearby bucket. That was my third catch of the day. I proposed using magic to catch a ton of fish, but Ende said that was boring. So, in the end, we just decided to have a traditional fishing contest.

For some reason, my wives and kid decided to leave me out of whatever they were doing, so this was my big distraction. At least I wasn't alone. Ende must have gotten kicked out by his family as well...probably.

"By the way, Touya..."

"What's up?"

Ende clicked his tongue as he cast his rod back out into the water. I took the chance to peek into Ende's bucket. He also had three fish. I didn't want to lose to him...

"I heard from the guild that there was a Dragon attack in Lestia recently."

"You don't say?"

Dragons didn't normally come to human settlements. After all, I had Luli on my side, and she'd issued a decree stopping them from targeting humans.

They were still allowed to fight in self-defense, but arbitrary attacks shouldn't have been possible. Well, there were outcast Dragons who weren't beholden to their kind, and there were also orphaned or juvenile Dragons who didn't respect senior authority.

"From what I heard, it was a relatively young Spike Dragon. Probably an outcast."

Spike Dragon? Guess he's...big and covered in spikes? Probably bigger than Luli. If I had to guess, I'd call it a silver-rank tier enemy.

"So, are you gonna go take it out?"

Ende had been taking on lots of missions in order to reach gold rank. If he stood still, he'd end up stuck on the same level as his daughter. His pride as a parent drove him onward.

"I was going to, but someone beat me to the punch. And here's the thing... Apparently, it wasn't killed by anyone registered with the guild. Plus, the Dragon's body just got left behind. No reports, no nothing. The person left it with the nearest town and said to use the proceeds to rebuild."

"Hoho... That's kinda interesting. Definitely a generous choice."

Dragons were just about worth their weight in gold, since almost every part of them was useful. I wondered what kind of person would just casually give away such a large Dragon corpse.

Back when I fought the Black Dragon in Mismede, I couldn't carry its remains, so I ended up just leaving it be. When I later learned how valuable it was, I really kicked myself. That sure was a long time ago.

I took a sip from my water bottle as I reminisced on the past.

"So, according to eyewitness statements, a kid killed the Dragon. Or more precisely, a girl with black hair and a katana strapped to her waist..."

"PFFFFFFHHHFH!"

"Welp. That about confirms it," Ende nodded and said that as I spat out a stream of water into the briny deep ahead of us. The spray of liquid created a little rainbow on its way down.

Wait, that's gotta be Yakumo, right?! My girl?! N-not just anyone could kill a Dragon, right?! Why'd she fight a Dragon?! You dumbass! But I mean...you helped people, so that's great! I'm your dad, so yeah! It's a good thing!

"Even if I warped us to Lestia now, she'd probably be long gone..."

“Probably, yeah. I heard the guild was looking for more details, but they couldn’t find anything. She was gone in a flash.”

She’d most likely used **[Gate]** to make her escape. Trying to deal with someone who had that spell was a real pain in the ass. *Wait, maybe that’s how other people see me...*

“Bah... Oh, got another bite... Hup... Ah, caught it,” I sighed softly and said that as I reeled in another fish. News of my daughter, who I’d still yet to meet, sent my mind into a frenzy.

Still, I really couldn’t help but wonder what the hell a jersey thread was supposed to be.

“Hm? Quun and Allis?”

“Oh, hey, Dad! Hey, Your Highness.”

“Hello, father.”

On our way back from the dungeon islands, we bumped into Quun and Allis. The two of them had been at a local cafe, it seemed.

“Wait, Allis. How’d you pay?”

“Quun covered me!”

Ende seemed concerned, but his inquiry was met with a blunt answer.

“Maybe I should give her an allowance...”

“Eh, it’s fine. You can just buy her what she needs when she asks, right?” I said that and shrugged at Ende’s comment. So long as she didn’t demand anything crazy, it’d be fine.

Ende was a silver-rank adventurer, so it wasn’t like he was hurting for money. He had three big eaters at home, which meant he spent a lot on groceries, but he still had more than enough left over for personal expenses.

I didn't want him giving his daughter endless pocket money and running himself ragged.

"Hey, Allis. Is there anything you want right now?"

"Uhhhm... I don't think so...? Maybe..." Allis tilted her head and trailed off as she pondered to herself. I wondered if she'd end up asking for something rare or expensive.

"Oh yeah, I could use some gauntlets. I left my usual ones back in the future."

"Gauntlets? You mean the kind brawlers use?"

"Yep."

Those were usually sold in weapon shops. Maybe she needed a special pair or something, though.

"Uhm... My pair is made out of Goliath leather and phrasium plating."

"...Phrasium? Were they custom-made?"

"Yeah, they're special. Her gauntlets were a special birthday present from you, father," Quun answered my question.

...Gauntlets for a child? What was I thinking? As I pondered my motivation, Ende suddenly put a hand on my shoulder.

"Hey, Touya... How about making your best friend's kid a gift?"

"I don't remember us being best friends..." I mumbled as I swatted Ende's hand away. Allis suddenly slumped her shoulders, making a very dejected pout.

Wait, I never said I wouldn't do it!

Ende noticed his daughter about to cry, which prompted him to turn to grab me by the scruff of my collar.

“You want money?! Is that it?! You greedy bastard! Fine! Take everything I have! I’ll do anything for my little girl!”

“Get off me, dumbass! It’s not like I can’t make them, but we don’t have all the materials!” I yelled at the moron in front of me and broke free from his grip.

Goliaths were giant monsters that looked like a fusion of a rhinoceros and a buffalo. They could get as big as Dragons, or even bigger, but they were rather rare. I’d certainly never seen one before. Oh, and they had a bad reputation. They were known as calamitous beasts because when they start rampaging, they go wildly out of control. I’d heard stories of them leveling entire towns.

“Can you find one, Father?”

“I mean, I could...but why are you looking so excited by the prospect?”

I could understand Allis being interested, but why was Quun looking up at me with sparkles in her eyes? That felt pretty sus.

“Goliaths can be used to make Gollem parts. Their horns and bones make for fine armor, while their blood makes a good conduit for ether lines. We can also use the fat and oils from their bodies as industrial lubricant.”

Well...that certainly explains your vested interest. Guess I have no issue with hunting one. Lemme just check my map...

A few pins dropped down around the projection.

“Oh... This one’s closer than I thought it’d be.”

I was a little surprised by the results. There was one of these monsters in Belfast. It wasn’t near any major areas, but it wasn’t too far from a village either. Honestly, it was a little worrying.

“Hm... This could be pretty bad. I better go kill it.”

“I’ll go with you, then.”

“Ah! If Quun’s going, then I’m coming too!”

“No can do, Allis. Your moms are expecting us home for dinner,” Ende said, stopping his daughter from following after me. He was swinging the bucket of fish in his hand. If he arrived late, then they wouldn’t have a main course.

“Awh! But...”

“I’ll have your gauntlets ready by tomorrow. Don’t worry.”

“Okay...” Allis murmured. She reluctantly gave up, much to her father’s relief. If he got home late, he’d probably end up getting in trouble with the girls. No doubt I’d get in trouble for enabling him as well...and I certainly didn’t want to make enemies of another man’s wives.

“Let’s get going, father.”

“We’ll speak later, Allis,” I said that, then grabbed Quun’s hand and used **[Teleport]** to head to Belfast.

I figured I should let the king of Belfast know what I was up to, so I shot him a text message explaining the situation. He sent one back pretty quickly, granting me permission to hunt it. Moments later, he sent another message asking to buy any excess materials after I was done. No surprise there. The man was shrewd as ever.

I’d never been to the village it was near, so we took a nearby road. Reginleif hadn’t been used in a while, so I took the chance to bust it out.

I used **[Storage]** and pulled it out. Reginleif’s cockpit wasn’t that big, but there was enough room for me and a child. Just as I was about to board it, however, Quun nervously stopped me.

“Uhm, father...can I ask you something?”

I wondered what she wanted. Usually, your daughter asking for something should be nice, but I had a strange, sinking feeling at the back of my mind.

“...What is it?”

“Can I please pilot your Reginleif?! I want to defeat the Goliath!”

Of course... I mean, I guess she can, but...should she?

“Have you ever piloted before? Not just a Frame Gear, I mean Reginleif specifically.”

“I’ve piloted Neo Reginleif before, but not this older model. That’s why I’d like to give it a shot.”

...Huh? I’m gonna remodel Reginleif at some point?

I tried to dig for more information, but got sparse details. Apparently it wasn’t major, just more like a transition from manual cars to automatic.

“You wanna try, then?”

“Thanks, father!” Quun exclaimed as she hugged me. That felt pretty good. I was glad Leen wasn’t around to see it, though. I felt like seeing that might make her fuss at me. I’d never say that to her face, of course.

I clambered up to the cockpit and slid the seat forward to accommodate Quun. Then, I made a little space in the back and sat there. It was a tighter squeeze than I’d have liked, but still good enough.

Quun set her phone in the middle of the dashboard and activated Reginleif.

“Off we go!”

Reginleif triggered [**Fly**], rising into the air at incredible speed. It was faster than I'd expected, which resulted in me bonking my head off one of the cockpit's walls.

"H-Hold on! Ease up on the output!"

"R-Right! Sorry, I used more power than I expected..." she said as the cockpit trembled.

Oh, whoops. The shock absorber isn't turned on... That explains it.

Quun must have noticed too, given that she swiped her fingers over to quickly amend that problem.

Reginleif stabilized, ending any and all turbulence. Any external impacts would be absorbed, preventing unwanted jostling in the cockpit.

"Hm... There we go. Now, where's this Goliath?"

"Three o'clock from our current position. About 120 kilometers out," I replied casually, pointing out the position on my projected map.

Reginleif began to soar through the air. It was a little shaky at first, but it wasn't long before it sped up and stabilized.

"I've never flown before... I've ridden in Mother Linze's Helmwig, but I never got to actually pilot it."

"No surprise, really. I doubt she'd want to risk you crashing. Even if we have automatic evacuation measures in place, nobody would want to chance that... Oh! There it is."

The monitor showed a large monster ahead of us. It was bigger than I'd expected. About two times bigger than Reginleif, in fact... I couldn't even begin to believe this was supposed to be some normal monster.

Its massive body was rolling around the forest, but once it heard us approaching, it looked up at the sky. It had buffalo-like horns on the

side of its head, a rhinoceros horn on its nose, and several spiny protrusions along its back. Its body was entirely hairless, clad in a jet-black hide that resembled armor.

“We don’t want to kill it in a way that damages the material, right? Let’s go with a slow and precise approach.”

“Of course. I’ll employ two Fragarachs. Any more would be overkill.”

Fragarachs were Reginleif’s primary weapons. They were a remote weapon that could change form and adapt to the situation as and when it was needed.

I couldn’t be sure that Quun had enough magic to use them properly, and I was honestly a little worried it might overwhelm her.

“Let’s see here... Fragarachs... Sword Mode.”

Two slabs of phrasium detached from Reginleif’s back before transforming into sword shapes. It was a little slow, but that was no real surprise.

“Here we go!”

Two crystal blades jutted out and roared toward the Goliath. But they ended up losing their trajectory mid-flight, completely missing their mark and crashing into the ground.

“Oof.”

“Why won’t it fly straight?!” Quun yelled out of surprise. It was her first time, so that was no big shock.

The more Fragarachs you had, the harder they were to control. There was a system that allowed the Frame Gears themselves to take over the bulk of the control, but that wasn’t installed on Reginleif, since I preferred the freedom.

Quun repeatedly tried to launch attacks at the Goliath, but it simply shrugged each blow off and dodged nearly everything that came at it.

“You might be better at just charging the thing.”

“Guh... I guess so...”

If we wasted any more time, it’d end up getting pretty late. Once the sun went down, it’d be even harder to hit our enemy...so wrapping this up sooner seemed better for everyone.

Quun called the crystal weapons back, holding one in each hand and charging at the enemy.

“GROAAARGH!”

The Goliath was understandably irritated after swatting away all those attacks. It roared at us as we descended.

“GRAAARGH!”

It began running forward, causing the earth to tremble in its wake. Quun ducked and avoided the attack, but her swing didn’t hit the Goliath. It was faster than she’d expected.

The Goliath made a U-turn and charged back at us.

“Ack. Mode change... Longsword!”

The two swords merged into one long blade. Then, Reginleif brandished the sword with both hands and swung forward, moving to trade blows with the beast.

The blade bit through the Goliath’s shoulder, cutting deep and causing the monster to fall forward.

“Got it!”

“Don’t count it out yet. It’ll be up again in a minute.”

The Goliath stumbled back up to its feet, shrugging off the bleeding wound.

“GRAAARGH!”

It then charged toward us, even angrier than before. Quun raised Reginleif’s blade again, but as she did, the Goliath’s horn shone with a blinding light.

“Eek!”

“Agh!”

The bright light from the monitor feeds caused me to close my eyes. Then, we felt a heavy tremor from outside that sent Reginleif flying backward. The shock absorbers prevented us from sustaining any damage in the cockpit, but it was still a serious blow. Reginleif destroyed trees beneath it as it tumbled across the ground.

“Quun, it’s charging us again!”

“I-I know!”

We could see on the monitors that the Goliath was almost upon us again. And to make matters worse, we were backed up against a cliff face.

“RAAARGH!”

At the last possible second, Reginleif rocketed skyward, moving out of the way and causing the monster to smash face-first into the wall.

“That was close...”

“Want me to take over now?”

Quun shook her head in response to my proposal.

“It’ll be fine. I can beat this thing,” Quun said as she calmly landed Reginleif back down.

The Goliath turned itself around to face us. It then charged toward us again, keen to finish the job. I wondered what Quun was planning this time... Reginleif brandished its blade again, and the Goliath's horn shone as it had earlier.

"Now! Mode Change! Aspis!"

A mighty impact rang through Reginleif as we were struck again. But this time, we weren't blown away. Reginleif had taken the impact head-on with a round shield. The Goliath was still strong enough to push us back...but even that didn't last long. For some reason, it stopped pushing us and fell down on the spot.

I glanced over and noticed that the fallen Goliath had a massive hole bored into its head. Quun had created a spiked shield at the last moment, and the beast had impaled itself on it.

A Goliath's hide was insanely tough. Had this been an ordinary shield, it might not have worked. But phrasium was an obscenely tough material if infused with enough magic, so not even the great monster could contend with that.

"I did it!"

"So you did. Good work."

The Goliath's skull was so badly mangled that it severely devalued the total worth of the carcass, but I kept that comment to myself.

Now that we'd killed it, we had to dissect it. I usually left that to the guild, but this thing was so insanely big that I didn't think Brunhild had the staff for it.

That was why I figured enlisting Belfast's branch of the guild was probably the best bet. We'd be selling most of it to Belfast anyway, since I only needed enough materials for Allis, as well as whatever Quun wanted.

I tossed the Goliath into **[Storage]** and told the king of Belfast that I'd drop it off outside the castle town. I could hardly bring something of its size into the capital, at any rate.

I had Quun pilot Reginleif to the outskirts of the royal capital, and then I let the Goliath's corpse fall to the ground in a nearby clearing.

After a short while, a guild representative showed up. He'd already been briefed by the king, and there was a team on their way to harvest it properly. That was certainly a load off my mind.

Now then...I'll grab the parts for Allis's gauntlets. Quun can get her stuff later.

Usually, tanning and treating hide until it became leather was a lengthy process, but the alchemy lab up on Babylon shortened the time needed significantly. I'd be able to finish the gauntlets that night.

The sun was down by the time everyone set to work on harvesting the Goliath. They used torches to guide their way. Better to take what they could before it started to rot, after all. Honestly, I couldn't help but feel bad for fighting this thing so late in the day.

"Shall we head home, then?"

"Yeah. I had a lot of fun today, father," Quun said that and smiled at me without a care in the world. It wasn't exactly meant to be a fun experience...but I was glad she enjoyed it.

I took Quun's hand and opened up a **[Gate]** back to the living room of Brunhild Castle. We passed through together...only to be greeted by a frowning Leen.

Wh-What'd I do this time?

"...Don't you think you should tell us if you're going to be late?"

"Oh... I mean...I-I was out with my kid, right? So...I thought it was fine?"

“Oh...? And are you her only parent? Do I not have a voice here?”

“W-Wait, that’s not what I meant!”

Crap. She’s mad. I got so caught up in the fighting that I forgot to text you. I’m sorry!

I started to sweat nervously when Quun suddenly laughed. I didn’t see anything funny about our situation, personally.

“It’s okay, father. Mother here’s just sulking because she wanted to go with us.”

“...I’m not sulking,” Leen said as she quietly pouted and glanced to the side.

Hm? Really now?

“She’s probably been steeping in this for a while, father... You’d do well to butter her up. Why not take her out on a date tomorrow?”

“I haven’t been steeping in anything! Agh... Whatever. Being angry about such a trivial thing would be absurd,” Leen stated as she let out a small sigh and shook her head.

Wait, did Leen just forgive me? Seems like Quun’s good at handling us.

“Hrm... They have had a parental spat, they have...”

“I’m a little jealous...”

“Same... Sure wish I could have that kind of argument...”

Yae, Linze, and Sue stared at us from across the room.

...Why, exactly, do you want to have a specific type of argument with me? Well, if I looked parental...that’s good, I guess. I’m not used to it, but I’m getting there.

“Hee hee hee... Now, Mother, shall we eat? All that fighting made me work up an appetite.”

“...All that fighting? Just what have you two been up to?”

Quun took her mother’s hand, talking to her as they walked off to the kitchen. Honestly, the two of them looked more like sisters than mother and daughter. It was an amusing sight.

All right, I better make Allis those gauntlets. Her dad won’t shut up about it if I don’t.

I clicked my tongue before opening up another **[Gate]** to the alchemy lab.



Chapter II: That's My Chivalrous Girl

It'd been two weeks since Quun's arrival. That time passed with no new information on any of my other kids.

Ende, Elze, Yae, and Hilde spent every waking moment focused on guild operations. They were really dedicated to rising through the ranks. Their efforts bore fruit after a while. The three girls hit silver, and Ende finally crossed the threshold into gold. That made him the third gold-ranked adventurer in the entire world. All three were still alive too. Old man Galen from Lestia, myself, and now Ende. Though I had a feeling my three battle-focused wives would join us before long.

Ende's newfound rank garnered him a lot of attention from numerous clients. Various countries had extended him offers to join their knight orders, even. But Allis said she didn't want to leave Brunhild, so Ende figured uprooting would be pointless. He was becoming quite the doting dad... Perhaps to a fault.

Allis mostly spent her time with Melle and her other moms...when she wasn't training at the castle with Elze, anyway. Whenever she walked around alongside Melle, Lycee, and Ney, they looked more like sisters. It was rather similar to how Quun and Leen looked when they spent time together. But that was to be expected, given the whole time travel thing. At least they didn't come back older than their mothers.

"So, what're you building now?" I called out to a trio who were hard at work assembling magic parts that I couldn't wrap my head around.

The trio being Doctor Babylon, Elluka, and Quun. The three of them had been up on Babylon for the entire two-week period, developing all sorts of gadgets. Frankly, I was a little concerned about what they might've been up to.

“You know that magic train in Felsen, right? I was thinking about gollemizing it.”

“Uh, what?”

“We figured we could keep the front part a normal train, but give it the ability to transform into a giant Gollem in case of emergencies...”

“H-hold on a sec!”

Converting a locomotive into a Gollem sounded like a good idea. It would eliminate the need for a conductor, and the magic power would be more efficient if it was run through a Gollem’s G-Cube. It’d provide Brunhild more business as well, since we had mana batteries to sell.

I could see it from that perspective, but did we really need the transforming aspect? As if sensing my confusion, Elluka started to explain.

“It’d be useful in cases of derailment, or if we ever need to reorganize the carriages. Oh, and it’d make for a handy defense against any bandits or robbers too.”

“Hrm...”

“Plus, Quun says that Behemoths appear more often in the future. It’s likely an effect of the two worlds joining, so why not start future-proofing things now?”

I guess that was one of the effects we’d predicted... But are there really gonna be that many down the line?

“Father, you said... Or rather, you will say...that the Behemoths aren’t as fearsome as most of the ones you’d faced in the past. They’re the kind that can be beaten by a group of red-ranks. Really strong ones do appear from time to time, however.”

Hrmm... The lower quality of the Behemoths must be due to the magic from two worlds mingling. It’s like the difference between a

natural and an artificial product. In that case, it should be possible for a Gollem train to repel them with warning shots or something... Maybe?

“Gollem trains are already pretty common in my time. Though I never expected I’d be part of their development...”

*Huh, so that’s how it is... The future was already determined...
...The trains don’t have faces on them, do they? Mom said there was one like that on TV back when she was a kid. It was called Thomas, or something. Scared the hell out of her. I think the future would be better if our trains were just normal trains... Well, as normal as transforming trains can be, anyway.*

As I pondered the matter, a phone suddenly started ringing. It wasn’t mine, but Quun’s.

Quun calmly pulled out her smartphone and brought it up to her ear. The case was pretty fancy...but I was more interested in who was calling her.

“Hello...? Hello...? Where are you now? Ugh... Okay. Don’t move, then. Send me a text with your location. Yep. Okay, just sit tight,” Quun spoke swiftly, then ended the call. She seemed somewhat disgruntled.

“So, uh, who was that?”

“The third one’s here. It’s Frei.”

“Huh?!”

Frei. Freigard. My daughter with Hilde. My second daughter, and Quun’s older sister. She was the third future child to appear after Yakumo and Quun...which meant my oldest kids were showing up before the younger ones. I wondered if there was a particular reason for that trend.

“Frei seems to be in Helgaia, the Land of Fiends.”

“Helgaia?”

That was a country of beastkin and demonkin demi-humans located on the western continent. It was the Reverse World’s mirrored reflection of Egret. The island nation was ruled by the archfiend. He was a vampire lord, and I’d met him once when his wife was kidnapped by pirates. From what I understood, they’d started trading with Egret after the world merger... So that was where one of my daughters had shown up, huh?

I heard a ping from Quun’s phone as she received a text. She immediately forwarded the message to my phone. It was just a map attachment. The location was some kind of forested area... There were a few buildings nearby, but it didn’t look like a town.

“She’s near a bandit stronghold. I told her to wait, but I have a feeling she’ll probably try to wipe them out instead.”

“Huh?!”

Wait, a bandit stronghold?!

“Frei is a girl with a staunch sense of justice. If she gets a whiff of something unjust, she usually tries to destroy it.”

“I mean, that’s not bad on its own but...she’s not actually planning to charge in there solo, is she?!”

If it was a stronghold, it would surely have more than a couple dozen people. There could even be a hundred men or more. Perhaps an army, even! A ten-year-old girl couldn’t handle that, no matter how strong she was.

“I-I should call Hilde, right?!”

“I don’t think you should waste any more time. Once she starts, it’ll only be a matter of time before the whole fortress knows. She gets, uh... Well, let’s just say she’s a bit destructive.”

“What is she, a barbarian?!”

“Well... Not exactly...” Quun mumbled, then sighed softly, her expression clearly mixed.

I called Hilde and found out she was at the training grounds, so I warped there with Quun right away. The moment I materialized, Hilde ran up to me in a panic.

“Wh-What’s going on?! Wh-Why the sudden call? And why’s Quun here?”

“We’ll explain on the way! I’m gonna go pick up Frei. You coming?!”

“Huh? Frei...? W-W-Wait, you mean my...?!”

Before Hilde could finish processing the situation, I grabbed her hand and prepared to warp to Helgaia. I’d been there before to exterminate Tentaculars for the archfiend, so teleporting to the mainland was relatively easy.

“W-Wait, Touya-dono! Where are you taking Hilde-dono?!”

“Sorry, Yae! I’ll explain later!”

By the time my shout reached Yae, the sight of her had already faded away, replaced by forest scenery.

“M-My daughter’s here, then?!”

“Tch... We’re a little far away. Lemme check my directions... Oh, this way?”

I saw a stone structure not too far from us. It was small, but it seemed to be a fort. I’d heard there was a civil war in Helgaia before the archfiend took control, so it was probably a remnant from then.

“Let’s hurry. Frei might have started fighting the bandits already...”

“Th-The bandits? The bandits?! What’s going on?!” Hilde roared, her eyes widening in shock.

C-Calm down, please! Let go of my collar! You're a whole lot stronger than you look!

Hilde let go, relieving my poor airways, and Quun began to explain the situation.

"She's fighting bandits all on her own?! Why would you let her do that?!"

"I-I didn't... That's why I'm here..."

Hilde furiously stormed off, charging toward the nearby building. The forest was dark, even though it was midday. That was due to the dense leaves blocking out the sunlight.

"She should be someplace around here..." I said as I looked around, but there was no sign of her. We were in bandit territory, so I couldn't exactly call out for her.

"Shhh... Father, mother... Listen..." Quun muttered as she motioned for us to pipe down.

Hm? She hear something?

"Ngh..."

Oh, I can hear something... What was that?

"This way..." Quun said that, then quietly led us through the underbrush until we caught sight of a girl sitting against the base of a large tree.

...Wait. She's not sitting. Is she...? Is she sleeping?

The little girl had her eyes shut. She was resting against a tree and snoring soundly. Her hair was blonde, cut down to her shoulders, and she wore a piece of light armor about her chest.

So this is Frei...



The armor looked similar to Hilde's, but her gauntlets and grieves were a fair bit bulkier. She didn't seem to have any weapons on her either... Did that mean she was a hand-to-hand fighter?

"Sis... Freiii... Wake up..."

"Mnh...? Quun? You're here early... Gimme a little longer... I'm still tired..."

Quun gently shook Frei's shoulders. Her eyes slowly opened, revealing two beautiful blue orbs that looked just like her mother's.

I wasn't certain of it until she opened her eyes, but once she did, I knew it for sure. This girl was my daughter, Hilde's daughter. She looked almost like a mirror image of the knight princess by my side.

"Mh...? Mother?! And father?! Wow! You're young! That's so strange!"

Frei jumped up out of shock and ran toward us. She then leaped up and practically dive tackled us.

Ack!

A small thud echoed out as she crashed into Hilde and me.

Yeowch! That armor's heavy!

"Uhm... Frei... Freigard, yes?"

"Yes! I'm Frei, Mother. Don't you know me?"

"We've never met before, sorry..."

"Oh, that's right. I forgot," Frei said that and smiled up at us before backing off a little.

"You don't know me either, father?"

"Uh, yeah, I don't. You look just like Hilde, though."

“Ooh, really? Thanks a bunch!”

I had a feeling that while their looks were similar, their personalities probably weren't. Hilde was very prim and proper, while Frei felt a lot more casual... A lot more lax than her mother, at least. She was still really cute, though.

She definitely seemed more like a kid than Quun. But perhaps Quun was a bad metric for maturity.

“By the way, Frei. Didn't you mention something about a bandit stronghold?”

“That's right, Frei! It's not safe around here!”

Quun asked what we'd been meaning to inquire about, and Hilde immediately raised her voice in concern.

“Well, when I woke up, I was at a small village south of here! They said bandits come and take their food every month. Isn't that awful? So I figured I'd come and destroy 'em!”

“Th-That doesn't mean you should go in alone, though!”

“Mother, you always say that a knight should be the sword and shield of those who can't take up arms, right?”

“Gah! I-I technically haven't said that yet...”

...Hm. Looks like Frei got her pretty good there.

“Y-You're just a child...”

“Some of the villagers were killed by them. If I do nothing, more might die. Being a child doesn't matter. If you can act, you should act. If you have the power to stop the suffering, you should exercise it.”

...Wow, that's uh...pretty intense.

I was honestly surprised. She had a pretty lax aura about her, but her resolve was firm. She clearly wasn't the kind of person who tolerated wicked acts.

That part of her absolutely resembled Hilde.

After a short pause, Hilde let out a small sigh.

"...Ugh. I...understand. We can hardly leave the bandits to their own devices. We'll aid you in defeating them, but we'll be returning to Brunhild right after."

"Huh? Really? Yippee! Woo!"

Frei jumped for joy, waving her hands up in the air. Her response was pretty amusing, since it displayed more of that childish side. Either way, our course was set.

"Frei, are you a fist fighter? I don't see a weapon."

"Hm? Oh, no! I just keep all my weapons in **[Storage]**," Frei said that and casually shrugged as she waved her hand, producing a massive blade out of thin air. It had to be at least a meter and a half long.

That thing's nearly as big as she is! And it's made entirely out of phrasium too... Well, aside from the handle, anyway.

"You can use that Null spell?"

"Sure can!" Frei exclaimed, then grinned as she hefted the greatsword up with ease.

*J-Just how strong is she?! Wait...is she using **[Gravity]** to manipulate the weight, maybe?*

"So is that your preferred weapon?"

"Frei has a wide variety of weapons in her **[Storage]** space. Her fighting style is oriented around swapping out weapons to suit the situation. In that regard, she's not quite a conventional knight."

“Huh?! I’m a proper knight! Chivalry isn’t about how you fight, it’s about how you feel! Right, mother?”

“...I don’t think I’ve said that yet, but I probably will...” Hilde mumbled. She looked utterly baffled, more than anything else. So that meant Frei was more of an all-rounder than a straight sword fighter like her mom. As far as sword training went, Hilde, Yae, and Moroha would have her covered. Plus, axes and bows seemed like the kind of thing Karina would be able to teach her.

“Most of my weapons were created by you, father. There are about a hundred of them. They’re all kitted out with **[Paralyze]** and **[Modeling]** too, so they can switch between stun mode and lethal mode.”

“Gah! That’s a bit much!”

What am I thinking, giving her all that stuff?! Lethal mode, really?! C’mon, man!

“I see. That’s similar to my sword. You can freely change its power. It’s useful, since it allows you to face weak bandits without worrying about killing them too easily.”

“Mhm. These bandits can’t die. They’ve gotta pay. Criminals can’t keep getting away with it. They need punishment! It’ll probably be fine if I break a couple bones, though.”

“I can’t disagree with that sentiment.”

Wow... It’s nice that the two of them are bonding, but...isn’t that a bit grim? You should be talking about something less morbid!

Quun must have noticed my inner concerns, as she crept up close to me.

“Don’t worry. That’s just how Frei is. By the way...out of all my siblings, she’s the scariest when she’s angry, so please do take care.”

...Really? It's kinda hard to imagine her mad. But I guess it's always the carefree ones who snap the hardest. Quiet types too, but she doesn't seem very quiet.

"Father. Do you know how many bandits there are?"

"Hm? Gimme a sec. Uhhh... Huh? That's weird, it's not working... They might have a barrier in place."

Helgaia was formerly part of the Reverse World, so I assumed they wouldn't have had any wards. But since it was a country mostly made up of demonkin, it made sense they'd be more in tune with magic than the rest of the world. Mages had likely imbued this fort with warding in the past, probably during the civil war. That might've even been the reason why the bandits chose the place as their base.

My best guess was that there'd probably be about a hundred of them. But demonkin were stronger than the average human. Plus, they probably had Golems and other such things at their disposal.

"Can you fight, Quun?"

"I can use all forms of magic except Dark and Light, much like my mother. But when it comes to fighting, I usually employ these..."

Quun trailed off as she flashed a storage card, producing two strange-looking guns from it. I'd seen them before... They were spellcasters. A type of magical gun, essentially.

"Oh, and we can't forget this little one either."

Quun waved another storage card...and out tumbled Mecha-Paula.

"Can this thing fight?"

"She's not on the level of any of the crowns, but she's still capable. She doesn't have any Golem skills, though, so it's just the equipment we've installed."

Parla bared her claws as if to accentuate Quun's point. Those sharp little edges sparked off little jolts of blue electricity.

Oh. Guess she's got stun claws. She's a little more useful than she looks!

"Hee hee hee... This is pretty fun! It's like going out on a family picnic!"

"I agree. It might be a little uncouth, but I'm certain it'll be enjoyable."

"...Not really sure I'd call this a picnic, guys."

Hilde and Frei stood side-by-side, smiling up at the fort. Just why were they so merry?

"Let's go. We've got some bandits to exterminate."

I didn't think my first family outing with Frei would be so violent... I couldn't help but sigh.

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"Grrrgh! Gonna crush you!"

A reddish-skinned ogre charged toward us. He was wielding a massive wooden log. The guy clearly had a lot of strength backing up his confidence. Taking a hit from that thing head-on would definitely hurt like hell. But that was only if he managed to land a hit.

"Hokay!"

Frei leaped into action, jumped up onto the log, ran along it, and deftly swung her weapon down to strike at the back of the ogre's neck.

"Gwagh!"

The ogre stumbled forward. He hadn't been decapitated, however. That was because Frei's greatsword was in stun mode, so its edges were blunted.

"Don't get cocky, brat!"

A spear-wielding werewolf lunged forward at Frei from behind. However, the little girl simply flung her weapon into the air without a care in the world.

Her sword immediately vanished, entering **[Storage]**, and a new weapon emerged from the very same spot. This time it was a beautiful katana. Frei jumped upward and grabbed the weapon, unsheathing it mid-air. She then spun around and used the naked blade to slice the werewolf's spear in half.

"Whah?!"

"I'm not being cocky."

Before the werewolf could even react, Frei's blade was at his throat. Just as I thought, he was under no threat to lose his head, as the blade blunted itself and simply thudded hard against his neck. Frei's finesse was a real sight to behold...

The werewolf made a few choking sounds before falling to the ground, unconscious. Frei then stowed the katana and produced a silver bow and a set of silver arrows. She fired off several shots into the nearby trees.

"Gwah!"

A dark elf who had been hiding atop a branch fell to the ground. Frei's arrows were enchanted with **[Paralyze]**, apparently.

So she can use a bow... Karina must have had a hand in that.

She stashed away her bow and arrows, switching to a halberd.

"She's using **[Storage]** like crazy... I almost can't believe how fast she swaps stuff out."

I was completely stunned. Even I couldn't use **[Storage]** that rapidly, so she was on a whole other level.

“Her weapons are enchanted with **[Apport]**, so they can fly to her instantly from within the storage space.”

“Oh, that makes sense. I never would’ve thought of that... Although, I guess I did think of that in the future...”

Quun must have noticed my bewilderment, so she quickly explained the secret behind the fast weapon switching. As she spoke, she used both her spellcaster guns to blast down some harpies from the sky.

Parla stood by her side, grappling and ultimately subduing a fairly strong-looking satyr. The scene was surreal, really.

“Lestian Sacred Sword: First Cutter!”

“Lestian Sacred Sword: Fifth Swirl!”

Frei and Hilde worked in tandem to cut down a large Golem. The cutting attack sliced its neck open, while the swirling strike gouged a hole in its belly. Considering the fact that it was their first time fighting together as mother and daughter, it was really impressive.

Given that Frei knew Lestian techniques, I could only assume Hilde taught her in the future.

“Your swordplay is splendid. It’s clear you’ve worked hard on it.”

“Hee hee hee! Thanks, Mother!”

Despite the shy flush on Frei’s cheeks, she never once stopped attacking. Bandit after bandit fell before her. She ducked and dodged, treating the encounter as little more than a game.

Wait, she’s got a hammer now?!

“Kaboom!”

Frei smacked a gigantic Golem square in the chest with a massive hammer, sending it smashing through a nearby wall.

*Now I see... I thought she’d been using **[Gravity]** to make her weapons lighter, but that’s not it. It’s **[Power Rise]**. That was totally*

what I just saw. The Null spell that enhances your physical strength. Does that mean she has two Null spells?

It was true that Frei had the spirit of a chivalric knight, but her way of fighting was just...way too violent. It was like watching a barbarian at work. She pulled out another weapon that resembled two scimitars fused together.

“Die!”

“Oopsie!”

A weretiger almost cut off one of my arms. That was entirely my bad, since I was far too distracted. I jumped back and dodged his weapon, then used Brunhild to fire a paralyzing round at my would-be attacker.

“Gwagh!”

The weretiger fell to the floor with his tongue lolling out. The bandits had already been whittled down to about half their numbers, and I’d barely done a thing.

Can’t just let my wife and daughters handle everything! I’ll have to show them what a dad can really do!

At that exact moment, a massive Golem wielding two axes burst into the room through a nearby wall. At first I thought it was one of those Frame Gear knockoffs, but it actually looked better made.

“Who are you?! Servants of the archfiend?!”

The man who spoke was a pale-skinned and red-eyed fellow. He was standing atop the Golem, around where its head should’ve been, in a kind of makeshift cockpit. From the look of him, he was probably a vampire... And likely the boss too.

“We’ve got nothing to do with the archfiend, but he’ll be here soon enough.”

Before the attack, I'd sent a message to him through a Gate Mirror. I didn't want to attack a building in his territory without advance notice, after all. The response message said he'd be heading over, but we decided not to wait. Him coming down to investigate was basically the same as consenting to us defeating the bandits, after all.

"Damn you! I won't be put down by brats!"

...Is he including me and Hilde when he says that? I'm married! I have a kid, damn it! Sure she's from the future, but that still counts!

That being said, vampires had long lifespans. Hilde and I could have very well been children from his perspective.

The Golem rumbled and whirred as it charged forward, swinging its ax. I wondered if he really thought he had a chance.

"Lestian Sacred Sword: Third Shear!" Hilde roared and jumped into the air, her blade ripping through one of the Golem's arms. The floor shook as it fell, the ax it held embedding itself in the ground.

"What the—?!"

Frei stood a little bit away from the startled vampire. She was wielding a massive lance.

"Hup!"

She leaned back before lunging forward, tossing the lance like a javelin. I wasn't entirely sure that was how it was meant to be used, but I didn't know enough about lances to dispute the matter.

The lance sailed through the air, piercing the Golem through the midsection. It blasted open, knocking its rider to the ground.

"Ugh!"

"Nice work, guys."

"AAAGH!"

Before the vampire could get up, Quun wandered over and riddled him with spellcaster bullets. He was down for the count. Honestly, I kind of felt like a useless spectator...

“Th-They took out the boss!”

“L-Let’s get outta here!”

“Not so fast.”

“I don’t think so!”

The bandits scrambled away in a panic, but Frei and Hilde refused to let any of them escape.

It didn’t take long for the entire group to fall.

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“Grand Duke... I’d like to thank you for your help.”

“Nah, if anything, I should apologize for not waiting...”

A short while later, the archfiend arrived with his soldiers. Though his title was archfiend, his species was vampire lord.

Apparently, vampire lords were a special type of vampire that had lived for over a thousand years. The leader of the bandits was just a standard vampire.

“This man was once a noble of our nation, though he was disgraced. I never expected him to turn to such vile banditry...”

The archfiend let out a small sigh as he watched the vampire being escorted away. Apparently, being a vampire lord didn’t necessarily give you dominion over regular vampires. Oh, and the vampires of this world didn’t have the ability to enthrall the people they sucked blood from either. Seemed that was just a thing in Earth fiction.

“There are many kinds of fiends...or demonkin, I believe you call us. Many of us have been persecuted by humans. That led to an

understandable sense of isolation, but some of us take it too far. They want to fight and hurt others... He's one such example of this mindset. The idea that it's okay to hate mankind out of some retribution. But I refuse to yield to such base anger. I know we can live in harmony."

It was pretty rough. Especially for the people who lived in the nearby village. The bandits had been extorting them for food and money, using the excuse that they needed the supplies to fight humans.

"Has Helgaia given any thought to joining our alliance?"

"Actually, yes. Our budding relationship with Egret has made the idea more palatable. Some are still reluctant, but they'll come around soon enough."

That was good news. The more people who allied with us, the better. It was a step to making this world a brighter place.

"By the way...is that child a relative of your wife, perhaps?"

The archfiend crooked a brow as he glanced between Hilde and Frei. They certainly looked alike, so it'd be natural to assume that.

"Uhhh, yeah. A relative, yep."

I couldn't exactly go into detail, so I left it there.

Frei walked over and got halfway through saying, "Actually, I'm their daughter," but thankfully, Quun slapped a hand over her mouth. What a good child she was.

The bandits were all taken into Helgaian custody. I was offered some reward money, but I told them to just give it to the nearby village to help them rebuild. I also gathered up a few broken Golem parts, since I figured Elluka might find them interesting.

With our business in Helgaia finished, we called it a day and returned to Brunhild. News of the country potentially joining us was a good enough reward for me.

“Yummy! Your food’s as good as it is in the future!”

“What a good girl you are!” Lu exclaimed and smiled wide as Frei happily chowed down on an omelet. We were all hanging out at Babylon’s rampart. She clearly enjoyed her meal... Maybe a little too much, even. The way she ate was quite similar to Yae’s. That wasn’t too surprising, though. They weren’t bound by blood, but they were still mother and daughter.

“Hmm... I’m quite jealous of you, Hilde-dono...”

“Don’t complain, Yae. At least you know your daughter’s out in this world already. Count your blessings!” Elze said. She clearly had little sympathy for Yae’s grumbling.

Hm... I wonder if there’s a rule that governs the order in which the kids appear.

“It means little if I cannot ascertain her safety or see her, it does not. I cannot help but worry...”

“Huh? Big Sis Yakumo isn’t here yet?” Frei asked, raising an eyebrow as she poked at her omelet.

I quickly briefed her on the situation, informing her that Yakumo had opted to travel around and fight for a bit instead of coming straight here.

“Tsk... That sounds like her all right. She could’ve at least come and said hello, but that’s just how she is. I’d like seconds please!” Frei sighed quietly as she commented on Yakumo, but didn’t stop eating for a second. When she was done with her serving, she immediately demanded more. We were all eating omelets too, but she had us beat in terms of pace. Part of me wondered if she wasn’t really Yae’s daughter in disguise.

“By the way, Frei. How old are you?”

“Me? I’m ten. Same as Yakumo,” Frei answered Linze’s question fairly nonchalantly as she dabbed her mouth with a napkin.

Same as Yakumo? So...does that mean there are only a few months between your birthdays? I guess that makes sense, since you have different mothers... So wait, Yae and Hilde gave birth in the same year, huh? That’s uh... Hm, that’s something.

Before I could get completely lost in musings about the future, Yumina spoke up, saying, “By the way, Touya... How do you plan on explaining Frei and Quun to the others in our castle?”

“Oh, uh... Well, hm...”

She raised a good point. I hadn’t even introduced Quun to any of our staff properly as of yet. She’d been spending most of her time in Babylon, other than her brief stint in the castle town, so I just hadn’t had the time. As for Frei, I’d just brought her straight to Babylon to avoid suspicion.

Maybe I can pass them off as my younger sisters or something?

“They’ll know, won’t they?”

“They’ll know...”

Just looking between Hilde and Frei, or Leen and Quun, it was pretty clear that they were related. If anything, we’d probably do better saying the girls were their sisters. But while that might work in Leen’s case, Hilde was a princess of Lestia. We couldn’t exactly make up another member of the Lestian royal family as a cover story. It could end up turning into a scandal where everyone thought the king had an affair or something.

“Our best course of action is probably to use **[Mirage]** and disguise them.”

“True enough. If we write them off as generic relatives of Touya, they should be able to excuse any trouble they cause.”

Huh? Trouble? Is that any way to talk about your own kids?! Well, whatever. Quun can use her own magic to disguise herself, and I'll give Frei that transforming badge I wore that one time.

Naturally, I configured the magic to make sure it didn't work on me or my wives. I didn't want our daughters to feel too isolated from reality.

After demolishing her food, Frei immediately asked to head to the castle training grounds. It seemed like Hilde had been doing a good job teaching her discipline, at least.

I went down to the training yard with the newly-disguised Frei. Our knights were all there, getting put through the wringer by our resident sword goddess.

"Hm? It is my brother, it is."

"Huh?"

Yae suddenly spoke up. I followed her gaze and saw her brother Jubei crossing wooden swords with Moroha. He was currently staying in Brunhild with his fiancée, Ayane, in order to sharpen his swordplay. From what I'd heard, he'd been diligently training with Moroha every single day since he'd arrived.

When I looked at him, I got the feeling Yakumo wouldn't be returning from her training trip for a while.

Being stupid with swords is probably baked into that family on the genetic level... Oh, he got hit.

"Oh, hey, you guys. Hm? This child... Oh, hey. You're Hilde's Frei, right? Nice to meetcha."

Moroha wandered over and casually looked right through Frei's disguise. I apparently had a ways to go before I could deceive any other gods.

"Hee hee. I'm here, Big Sis!"

“Sis?”

Frei’s words caught me off-guard. Wouldn’t she be more of an aunt than a sister?

“Big Sis Karen said to never call her Auntie Karen, so we just call you two our sisters instead!”

So you caused this, Karen... Gimme a break. It’s not like they’re calling you an old lady or anything! You’re literally their aunt!

“I want to train! I want to fight my mother! Is that okay, father?!” Frei asked, looking up at me with twinkling eyes.

Uhhh...I dunno...

I glanced over at Hilde, who nodded.

First Allis, now this. Why’d these future kids want to fight their parents so badly?

“You have to use wooden swords here, so you can’t use your **[Storage]** technique, okay?”

“That’s fine! I have lots of training weapons in there as well! Look, see?!” Frei swung her arm forward as she said that, materializing a large spear with a blunted edge in her hand. That sure was handy... Seemed like she had more weapons in there than I gave her credit for.

“Well, I guess it’s fine, then... Just don’t do anything too risky, okay?”

“It’ll be fiiiine! Okay, let’s fight!” Frei roared as she hopped on ahead and went over to Moroha.

Hilde took a wooden sword from a nearby knight and headed in the same direction.

Jutaro started leaving the match area so as to not get caught up in the conflict, but Frei stopped him for a moment to say something.

After a couple of seconds, he carried on walking over to us. His face was the picture of confusion.

“Something wrong?”

“Er, well... Do I know that girl from somewhere? She just told me to watch her closely, and...called me Uncle Jutaro?”

Jutaro tapped his chin as if plumbing his memory for the missed connection.

Heh, guess that makes sense. Even if they're not blood-related, Yae'll still be a mother to Frei, which means Jutaro is her uncle.

“Uncle... Uncle, though? I'm only twenty-three, am I not? Surely she can't think I look that old.”

Jutaro seemed rather put off by the idea that he might be considered an old man, and I could understand why.

“Fret not for the details, brother. Most men bald someday, they do.”

“B-bald?! I-I'm not balding yet, am I?!”

Yae's tactless comment veered the confusion straight into indignation.

Don't worry about balding, Jutaro. Babylon has some pretty good hair tonic.

As the siblings bickered by my side, the mother-daughter training match began.

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“Gah! I lost!”

Frei was on her back, breathing heavily. She could only muster up enough strength to yell out. Hilde's wooden sword was held to her throat.

“Hilde-dono is sharp as ever, she is...” Yae said, letting out what felt like a relieved sigh. She was probably glad to see her fellow swordswoman wasn’t bested by her own child.

I wasn’t worried, personally. The girls had enough divinity in their wedding rings to put them on the level of servile gods. They probably couldn’t lose to normal mortals anymore.

“Man... She really had a whole arsenal in there.”

I gazed at the pile of training weapons in amazement. Hilde had forced Frei to utilize just about all of them. There were wooden swords, bamboo swords, blunted spears, and even a massive mallet... There had to be at least a hundred weapons laid out in front of me. Who was this girl, Musashibo Benkei?

Frei’s **[Storage]** fighting style was made possible thanks to the **[Apport]** enchantment on her weapons. Her gauntlets had special crystals in them, as did all the hilts of her weapons. The crystals resonated with a type of magnetic attraction, making them warp to one another instantly. That allowed Frei to easily call upon weapons from **[Storage]** at will, but I hadn’t realized just how many she had hidden in there.

[Storage] was, as the name suggested, a large-scale storage space in another dimension. If you organized it properly, you’d have no issue sorting through it, but if you just tossed stuff in, sometimes you could pull the wrong thing out.

I was sometimes guilty of making that mistake... Though, in my defense, I’d been meaning to get around to organizing it.

Frei probably had some kind of order to her storage space. I wondered if it was by number, type, or some other method... I also wondered just how many more weapons she had hiding in there, just out of sight. The fact that she could instantly pull out the exact

weapon she needed on the fly was seriously impressive. I couldn't even begin to imagine the level of skill it required.

That said, even though Frei had pulled out weapon after weapon, Hilde still managed to handle each and every one. Frei seemed to be a talented all-rounder, but that meant she was no true specialist when it came to any particular weapon type. In effect, she was a jack of all trades but a master of none. Her main strength was her adaptability and versatility on the battlefield.

"I knew you'd beat me."

"You're very strong, Frei. I think you should be proud of that. You're a true daughter of mine, I'm sure."

"Heh heh heh! I'll just get even stronger, then!"

Hilde offered a hand to Frei and helped her up. The little girl then hugged her mother tight. Seemed like the match was a bonding experience for them.

"E-Er, Grand Duke... Who is that girl, exactly?"

"Oh, uh... She's a relative of mine, yeah."

"A relative of yours... That certainly explains it..."

Jutaro seemed utterly terrified by Frei's ability, but he quickly accepted my explanation.

Don't worry too hard, man. You'll end up going bald.

"You fight well. I like that style of yours! How many weapons do you have in total?"

"I have lots and lots and lots of them, yep. And not just ones Father made either. I find lots when I go out dungeon diving. The useless ones and the really important ones are on display in my room," Frei shrugged as she replied to Moroha.

...A room full of deadly weapons? Is that normal for someone who's only ten? Wait, what does she even mean by useless ones? Like ceremonial weapons or less durable ones, maybe?

"Oh, that reminds me! Father, I need to go somewhere!" Frei yelled over, charging until she was right in front of me. Jutaro seemed even more confused by her calling me father, but I just didn't address it this time.

Somewhere she needs to go? Like how Quun wanted to see Babylon? Where? A weapon shop? Oh, maybe she wants to see the dwarves forge stuff?

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"Wowie! This hammer shoots lightning, right?! I love this design! It's so cool!"

"Damn right, kid! You got a good eye for this kinda thing!"

The young girl and the musclebound meathead exchanged excited glances with each other as they looked over the weapon collection. As for their identities... It was one of my daughters from the future, and the king of Felsen.

Where were we? Well...the king of Felsen's royal weapon collection room, of course. There were weapons here that once belonged to great heroes, villains, and just general notable figures from history. I had no idea why she wanted to come here, of all places.

"I-Is this Bloodys the Darksword?! Once wielded by the despotic tyrant Rastlie?! Wait, is this crack from..."

"Ooh! To think you'd notice the chip here! The damage was caused by Phalucius the Lightblade, wielded by none other than Phalluce the virtuous!"

"That's amazing! A darksword and a lightblade! How fantastic!"

The two were getting along well... A little too well, in fact. It was a surreal sight, seeing such a tiny girl excitedly chat about weapon lore with a beefy old geezer.

“...Did I raise her wrong somehow?”

“Don’t worry, Hilde... It’s fine to have at least one or two hobbies, right? Maybe...” I tried to reassure my wife, but I wasn’t sure I was doing a very good job.

We both clearly felt the same about having a weapon junkie for a daughter.

“I’ve never seen anyone who can match his speed when it comes to weapons. It’s quite a pleasant sight, really,” Ellicia, the king’s fiancée, laughed quietly as she watched the two geek out over weapons.

Ellicia was the second princess of Regulus...and Lu’s sister. Her marriage to the king of Felsen was a few months away. Apparently, when they saw our ceremony, they brought the date up.

Zanac, owner of Fashion King Zanac, had told me not too long ago that he’d filled a wedding dress order for them. It seemed the wedding outfits we wore had sparked something of a global trend. Once it was discovered that they were of Zanac’s design, he was flooded with orders from various noble or royal families.

He was incredibly busy now. Busy enough to set up an entire subdivision dedicated to weddings, even. It was nice to see him in business.

“If she’s a relative of yours, Grand Duke, that makes her a distant relative by law to us as well.”

“Ah ha ha... Yeah, I guess so.”

I couldn’t help but smile wryly in response to Ellicia’s words. She was Lu’s sister, which made her my sister-in-law. That meant she wasn’t just a distant relative to Frei... She was her future aunt!

Man, this family tree's getting kinda complicated. Oh yeah, I guess the king of Lestia's her blood-related uncle too...

"By the way, Grand Duke... Those Gollems from the new world... Er, I mean the western continent. Can't we make them here?"

"Gollems? It might be possible to make factory-model Gollems without any complex skills or anything, but that doesn't really solve the G-Cube or Q-Crystal issue. You'd need incredibly talented specialists and a whole host of rare materials to make those."

The Q-Crystals were the most troublesome of the two. They were akin to a Golem's brain, and were a mass of concentrated behavioral programming. According to Doctor Babylon, they began as basic command imprints that were then allowed to naturally develop over time. That led to the Golem's individual nature and personality. But the manufacturing process and methods of actually imprinting them were a tightly kept secret by most of the western continent's nations. Though we did have Elluka on hand, who'd dabbled in making Gollems before.

"Is that so... How unfortunate..." Ellicia mumbled, looking pretty dejected. That made me feel bad. It did remind me, though, that Ellicia had come to Felsen to study that kind of thing in the first place. It was during that educational visit that the king of Felsen set eyes on her for the first time.

She'd always had a vested interest in ancient artifacts and other abnormal applications of magic.

"I do have some Golem parts if you'd like to see them. There's some Q-Crystals and G-Cubes too, I think."

"R-Really?! Can I?!"

Ellicia's demeanor suddenly shifted entirely. Her eyes lit up and she bounded toward me.

B-Back up, ma'am! You're too close!

I didn't want to clutter up the collection room, so I headed out to the Felsen castle courtyard. Once we got there, I whipped out all the Gollem parts I'd obtained from the Helgaia bandit fort the other day.

"Wow! Whoa! Are these all Gollem parts?"

"Yes, they are. Hm... Oh, here. This cubic part in the chest here is the G-Cube. And...this one with the little grooves carved into it, that's the Q-Crystal."

I picked at the debris, pointing out the most important parts to Ellicia. She started examining the various pieces with great interest.

"So this is the source of the magic circuitry... I see... Interesting... If you were to sever the ether line here, then... Aha, it'd stop this part functioning..." Ellicia mumbled to herself as she started inspecting the parts more closely. There was a strange glint in her eyes.

"My Ellicia's one of the finest magitechnicians around. In fact, that magic locomotive of ours was built largely thanks to her. I'd probably rank her in the top five engineers in all of Felsen," the king of Felsen grinned as he lavished praise upon his bride-to-be. I had absolutely no idea she was that talented.

"Wait, seriously?!"

She's not on Babylon or Elluka's level, but that's some high praise from the king himself... I daresay she's worthy of being royalty in a nation like this, then.

"She and Quun'll get along fine!"

I couldn't help but agree with Frei. They were both super into technology stuff, after all.

"Er, Grand Duke? Could I ask you to grant me this G-Cube and Q-Crystal? No, actually...can I please have all these parts?!"

“Huh?”

Ellicia was being incredibly bold. Honestly, I couldn't help but be impressed.

Since the two worlds had merged, Gollem technology and other such things had gradually made their way to the eastern continent through the land bridge connecting Panaches and Refreese.

Felsen was on the other side of the continent from that land bridge, so it made sense that Ellicia would be desperate to finally get her hands on some of it. She'd probably heard all kinds of stories, but had no physical access.

It'd probably be fine if I gave these parts to her. They were just appropriated from normal bandits...and it wasn't like they were legacy Gollems or anything important.

I quietly pondered for a few moments before the king spoke up. He probably assumed I was reluctant to part with the tech.

“Duke Brunhild, if you require incentive...I'd be willing to pay, or part with something from my collection...”

I don't want anything like that, man...

My eyes suddenly veered left, and I saw Frei's eyes positively light up at the mention of getting something from the king's collection.

Hm? You want something? H-hrm...

“Very well, then. Please give this girl something from your collection. That'll suffice as payment.”

“Yippee! Yay! I love you, father!” Frei exclaimed as she bounded over and tackle-hugged me.

...Damn it. I can't look down on Ende for folding to Allis anymore... I'm just as bad.

“...Father?”

Both the king and his fiancée raised their brows.

“Don’t mind her, please,” Hilde said that and smiled stiffly as she waved dismissively.

“Okay, time to pick my weapon!”

“W-Wait! I didn’t say you could pick! Th-There are pieces in my collection I refuse to part with!”

Frei started dashing toward the collection room. The king of Felsen could only follow after her in a panic. It was crazy how similar the two of them were.

“Eh heh heh... If I analyze these parts, we may well be able to create Golems in Felsen. How exciting!”

Ellicia couldn’t wipe the grin off her face as she cradled a G-Cube and Q-Crystal in her arms. I didn’t say it out loud, but part of me was mildly concerned about the future of the Felsen royal family.

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“It’s been a while, Frei. Are you doing okay?”

“I’m fine! Nice to see you too, Allis!”

Allis and Frei, who’d reunited at last, gave each other a high five. They were sitting at a table in Parent.

Quun didn’t partake in the high-fiving. She was too busy peeking beneath a tablecloth.

“Something wrong, Quun?”

“Er, don’t worry about it...”

“Your moms aren’t gonna try it again. It’ll be fine.”

Allis knew exactly what Quun was looking for. Quun had figured that was the case as well, but still felt it was better to be safe than sorry.

After confirming the lack of any sneaky spy cats, Quun took her seat and sipped at a cup of tea. Her gaze was immediately stolen by the odd black dagger on the table, however.

“...Frei? Another of your dangerous implements?”

“Glad you asked! This is the Shadow Edge, an ebonblade wielded in Regulus by a chivalrous thief named Medeus some two-hundred years ago!”

“Of course it is,” Quun simply sighed as her sister burst into a passionate explanation.

Frei always was one for unusual weapons or armor. She’d even picked up plenty of cursed goods on the dungeon islands. She was a cheery, well-meaning girl with a strong sense of justice...but when it came to weapons, her judgment was less sound.

Still, Quun felt she had no place to comment. She was similarly obsessive when it came to magitech, after all. The two sisters were very alike in that respect.

“The whole thing’s really black! Also, it feels like there’s some weird magic in it! Can it do anything special, Frei?”

“Yep! The Shadow Edge has a unique ability! Check it out!”

It seemed like Frei had been waiting for Allis to ask exactly that question, because in response she nonchalantly stabbed the jet-black blade into the table they were sitting at.

Just...right in the middle of the restaurant. Stabbed the table. The two other girls began to panic immediately. What would they do if they were banned? Their favorite hangout spot had been ruined by a weapon junkie!

But...the blade didn’t penetrate the table. It simply vanished. In fact, the tip jutted upward between the two seated girls, rising out of nowhere.

The knife had been stabbed into a part of the table covered by the shadow of Frei's elbow, yet the tip was now sticking out of the area covered by the shadow of her finger.

"...What is this? Teleportation?"

"Sure is! The shadow edge can go anywhere within the space of the same shadow! Well, so long as I can see it, anyway. Pretty cool, huh?"

Quun immediately recognized how terrifying the weapon in front of her was. A blade that could pierce shadows... There was no telling how useful it could be. Hell, you could even incapacitate your foe by stabbing them in the foot if they had that foot in a shadow connected to the blade. It was the perfect weapon for assassinations.

"It's similar to Yakumo's..."

"No way. Hers uses **[Gate]** to move her sword around. Plus, she'd never use it in normal fights," Allis shook her head as she rejected the comparison.

Yakumo was a serious and honorable fighter. She absolutely wasn't the kind of person to use her power to stab her enemy from the dark. But even though she disliked the ability, she acknowledged its power. Her parents had told her that if the time ever came to use it, then she shouldn't ever hesitate.

Fairness was one thing, but one should never subscribe to honor to a fault. Pride wasn't something you put before the safety of others, after all.

Frei felt the same way. She was more than happy to employ underhanded techniques if the situation called for it. Brunhild's code of chivalry wasn't founded on old-fashioned concepts of protecting your own pride. It was more about protecting others than anything else.

With the topic of Yakumo now being brought up, Allis suddenly gasped and turned to Quun as if she'd remembered something.

"Hey, Quun...that reminds me, you mentioned something about the order we're coming over the other day, remember? Got any ideas now?"

"Oh, that. It's just a hypothesis, but...do you remember when the timequake hit?"

"Oh, I remember! Back when the core was running wild, right? Ummm..." Frei stared into space, dwelling on the memory. The moment time first stood still was an incident she wouldn't soon forget. It was still etched into her memory.

"Remember our positions. Where was Yakumo situated?"

"Uhm... Well, wasn't she with me?" Allis answered Quun's question.

"Try to remember her exact position. Who was in front?"

"Huh? Uhm, lemme think... I think Yakumo was in front? I wanted to jump ahead, but..."

"So Yakumo was ahead of you, yes?"

"Yeah! And then you were ahead of her...and Frei was ahead of you. Don't you remember?"

"Wait, no way!" Frei suddenly raised her voice out of shock. Quun simply nodded.

"Precisely. Allis was the furthest from the core. She showed up before any of us. Then Yakumo appeared, then myself...then Frei."

"Hm? Oh! I get it now! We're coming in based on how far away we were from the core!" Allis finally reached the same conclusion, yelling out in surprise.

"Well, it's just a theory for now."

“But that means the next to arrive should be...” Frei suddenly recalled who was ahead of her on that fateful day.

The two girls who were right next to each other. The two girls who were closest to one another. The two girls who were the most attached to each other out of all the siblings. It made sense, after all, since their mothers were twins.

Quun remembered as well. And if her hypothesis should prove true, it'd be *them* arriving next... Elna and Linne.



Chapter III: The Twins and Their Daughters

“Hah!”

“Gah!”

“Let’s stop here.”

The wooden sword in Frei’s hand stopped mere inches from the female knight’s side. Hilde, who had been refereeing the mock battle, called an end to it upon seeing that.

“Aww, I lost...”

“You’re amazing, Frei! You’re so small, but so strong!”

“Well, she is one of the grand duke’s relatives... It’s not that surprising.”

Frei’s prodigious skill received a mixed reaction from the knights who were watching the fight. Despite her looks, she was a gold-ranked adventurer (in the future at least). There was no way she’d lose to standard soldiers.

“Hee hee hee! I won! But hey, lady...your right leg was acting funny at the end there. Did you twist it?”

“Huh? Oh... Yes. It happened when I was trying to do that low slash earlier...” her opponent said that and raised her leg a little, moving it around a bit as if to check for pain.

“Hey, fath— Er...Y-Your Highness! Heal her!”

“Yep, yep...”

I used [**Cure Heal**] on the knight, prompting her to almost apologetically bow afterward. I could understand why, since it must have been a little awkward using your national leader as a health

dispenser...but the one using me here was more Frei than anyone else.

After the match ended, Frei found herself surrounded by a gaggle of female knights. Over the past few days, she'd become somewhat of a mascot for the knight order...and she was remarkably popular with the girls.

Unlike Quun, who was perfectly content to stay cooped up in Babylon, Frei was quite the people person. It probably helped that she was so cute.

"Touya, you're grinning..."

"Oh, my bad!"

Hilde pointed out my expression, which I promptly fixed.

I was just happy that my daughter was popular, though...

I looked back at Hilde, who seemed to be struggling to keep a grin off her own face as well. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black... The two of us were definitely overly doting, though. Perhaps that wasn't a bad thing to have in common with your wife.

As I mulled that over, my smartphone began to vibrate.

Huh, I wonder who's calling...me...? Ugh!

When I saw the incoming caller ID, I hesitated for a moment... But after what felt like an eternity of pondering, I bit the bullet and picked up the call.

"Uh...hey."

"Oh, Duke Brunhild! It's good to hear your voice!"

"...Yeah, yours too..."

The ridiculously shrill voice in my ear was enough to make me move my phone away. There was no mistaking this larger-than-life way of speaking.

The caller was Robert, prince of Panaches. Or as I preferred to call him, the pumpkin-pants prince. He was also the master of the blue crown, Distortion Blau. I'd met the guy a few times, but he was a little too intense for me. I just didn't have the patience for someone with his personality... Even over the phone, he was as overbearing as ever. It went without saying that he was the least popular among his fellow crown masters.

"So, uh, what's up?"

"Well, you see...there's someone I'd like for you to meet! The king of Rhea."

"Rhea?"

Rhea... What was that again? Oh, right! Isn't that the island kingdom northwest of Panaches? I think I remember that.

"What does the king of Rhea want with me?"

"Well, you see...it's about that Puretree of yours."

The Puretree was a divine tree I'd planted in the middle of Isengard to purify the corruptive influence that the wicked god had left there. I couldn't imagine what the king of Rhea had to do with that, but I shrugged and accepted the meeting anyway.

From what I'd heard, Rhea was a bountiful land ruled over by the elves. It was somewhat similar to the Sea of Trees, probably.

I'd never heard anything bad about them, so meeting with them formally was fine by me. From what Robert told me, Rhea had recently opened up diplomatic relations with Panaches, as well as the Rephan Kingdom to their southwest. They hadn't broached any

contact with Zadonia or Dauburn yet, however, probably since the conflict between the two had only recently simmered down.

It was fairly well known that I'd planted the Puretree, so they probably hoped to use their connection with Panaches to get in touch with me. Still, there was only one way to find out what they wanted.

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I decided to take Yumina and Leen with me on the trip to Rhea. Yumina was great when it came to diplomacy, and Leen was more experienced at dealing with a variety of races. Plus, Leen worked in a diplomatic capacity back when she served Mismede, so she was perfect for this job.

But it seemed like we had another companion who was set on joining us...

"Rhea's a country with many ruins. It's home to various legacy Gollems from ancient conflicts. You may well be able to find some Golem parts you've never seen before, father. I'd highly suggest we look into it."

"Quun, you little pest... This isn't a vacation, it's a diplomatic mission."

"I'm aware, mother. I just meant that it's something we could look into while you're taking care of diplomatic affairs," Quun replied. She couldn't help but giggle at Leen's grumbling.



When I'd mentioned I was going to Rhea, she just about begged to join me. Apparently, she'd met the king before... At least, in her personal past.

"Are we all ready, then? Blau! Do your thing," Robert spoke up, prompting the small blue Golem by his side to raise one of its hands.

As that hand twirled about, the scenery around us seemed to melt away and distort. But gradually, it returned to normal. This was the power of Distortion Blau, the ability to bend space itself.

Once the distortion wore off, we found ourselves surrounded by greenery. We were in Farn, the royal capital of Rhea. It was a capital city, so there were a great many buildings, but there was also an incredible amount of lush vegetation all around. It was as if the city was built into a forest. I looked around and saw citizens coming and going, each with smiles on their faces.

"There are a lot of elves here..." Yumina couldn't help but mutter the obvious as we walked through the streets.

There were definitely a whole lot of people around. And not just elves, either. There were humans, beastfolk, and dragonewts too... But elves were clearly the dominant species here. The ratio was probably seven elves to every three non-elves.

"From what I understand, Rhea was originally a nation of elves, though they do have an active immigrant population. Just about all the high-ranking positions within the country belong to elves, however."

Quun's explanation made perfect sense to me. Elves were often associated with the forest, so the lush greenery all around us in their capital was clearly by design.

We continued walking down a narrow roadway until we spotted a castle in the distance. It was in a clearing, surrounded by trees.

Is that the elf king's castle?

I looked around and found my mouth agape as I saw a tree near the castle... It was almost as big as the building itself! It dwarfed every other tree in the vicinity, even.

"Come, then! His Majesty should be waiting for us. Not too far to the castle no—" halfway through his sentence, Prince Robert fell flat on his face and began to snore.

That forced slumber was the price he needed to pay in exchange for using Blau's crown ability. There was quite a bit of distance between Brunhild and Rhea, so he'd probably be sleeping for quite a while.

I could've just simply used **[Recall]** on Robert to look at his memories and open up a **[Gate]** to the place, but Quun insisted on seeing Distortion Blau in action at least once.

Robert was apparently egged on by that and said he'd be happy to ferry us there with his own power. Thankfully, we had some Panaches knights with us, so they could look after him.

The knights quickly hauled Robert up, carrying him along with them in a manner that suggested they were well used to it at this point. Just as we were about to carry on our march to the castle, a Golem carriage pulled up next to us.

"Prince Robert of Panaches, Duke Touya of Brunhild. I've been sent from the castle to fetch you."

An elven man stepped out of the carriage. Well, it looked more like a minibus being pulled by crawling legs than a typical horse-drawn carriage, but still... The elven man in front of us looked to be in his twenties. He had long golden hair tied up in a bun at the back of his head and wore stereotypical black and white butler attire.

Personally, I thought he seemed a bit young for a job like that, but ages were deceiving when it came to his kind.

As I stared down the man, Quun came up from behind me and tugged at my sleeve. What did she want now, I wondered?

“Father... That’s the elf king.”

“What?!”

I looked to the young-looking elf, then back to Quun.

That’s the king?! Why’s he dressed like a butler?!

“He probably wants to surprise you by revealing his identity later on... He’s a bit of a prankster... Or at least, he is in the future.”

“A prankster? What a joke...” Leen, who’d been listening to Quun’s murmuring, couldn’t help but say that and sigh.

Is he joking? Or maybe he’s trying to get a grasp of what kind of person I am?

Elves tended to err on the side of caution, so many of them were hesitant to share their true feelings. After all, it wasn’t too uncommon to meet people who seemed friendly on the surface, but harbored malicious intentions beneath that. With that in mind, I couldn’t blame him for trying to figure us out in advance.

“Is everything well?”

“Yes, we’re fine. I’m honored that you’d greet us in person, Your Majesty. Though I must say, I never expected you to be wearing such an unusual outfit.”

The smiling young man’s eyes widened in shock once Leen’s words reached his ears.

Sorry... My wife’s also a bit of a prankster, so she doesn’t like being caught out.

After a short stunned silence, the young-looking elf grinned and raised his hands into the air.

“My, you got me... I waited for Prince Robert to fall asleep before revealing myself, but it seems that was all for naught, eh? How’d you know?”

“I’ll just say that you exude a certain...royal aspect that I couldn’t help but notice,” Leen replied very politely, even though I knew she was lying. Our daughter had just given her the answer!

“Hm... If you say so... No matter, welcome to the Kingdom of Rhea. I am, as you properly deduced, the king, Ervin Rheawind.”

“I’m Mochizuki Leen, the fifth grand duchess of Brunhild. Leen being my given name. As for these two...”

“I’m Mochizuki Touya, the grand duke of Brunhild.”

“I’m Mochizuki Yumina, the first grand duchess of Brunhild.”

By marrying me, Leen and the others had married into the Mochizuki family name as well. Since I was Japanese, they’d also taken to using my native name order when it came to their full names. But since they’d also married into the Brunhild nobility, our family name was also Brunhild.

We weren’t the only royal family to have this kind of surname and national name disparity, however. It was just one of those things that happened sometimes.

In Leen’s case, she was both Mochizuki Leen and Leen Brunhild. Similarly, Yumina was both Mochizuki Yumina and Yumina Brunhild.

I didn’t really want to call myself Touya Brunhild, though. It sounded kind of lame, honestly.

“And who’s this young lady?”

“A pleasure to meet you, King Rhea. My name is Mochizuki Quun. I’m a member of the Brunhild royal family. I wished to visit Rhea and see its magnificent forests, which is why the Grand Duke saw fit to let me accompany him.”

Quun pinched the hem of her skirt and gave a small curtsy. She was surprisingly good at formalities... But she’d probably been raised that way, since she was a royal and all.

“I must admit, I was also hoping to see your crown. I’ve heard much about Grand Grun.”

“Ha ha ha ha. I daresay you appear far more interested in Grun than you are in me. Well, let it not be said that I deny my guests.”

The elf king made a waving gesture with his hand, prompting the Golem carriage near him to slide open. A small mechanical hand then reached out from the interior before the entire Golem emerged from within.

The Golem looked much like the blue one next to me, except green. And I couldn’t help but notice it was a little more feminine in shape as well. It had what looked to be some kind of radiator or vent on its head that resembled a ponytail, and there was more...curvature to its general shape. There was also some metal about the machine’s waist that jutted out like a skirt.

Golems didn’t really have genders, but they could have gendered personalities based on the Q-Crystals loaded into them. Elluka’s cat-shaped Golem, Bastet, was quite feminine, for example.

“This is Grand Grun, master of earth’s bounty and incarnation of the Mothertree. She’s been my partner these last two thousand years.”

“Greetings. Crown Series Designation CS-06. Gran Grun, at your service.”

Wow, it can talk... I wonder what price you have to pay to use its ability... Probably something bad, I'd bet. I'm guessing it's not physical though, just based on the elf guy.

I glanced to my side and saw Quun's eyes positively sparkling with joy at the sight of the green Golem.

"Haven't you seen this thing in the future?"

"I have not. I've never been allowed to attend any of your conference meetings, and King Rhea never brings Grun with him, anyway... I'd never seen her before. She's lovely!"

...Lovely? Not sure if I'd call a Golem that, but fair enough.

"Now, please come aboard. I'll take you to the castle at once. Grun, you first."

"Understood," Grun said that, bowed, then vanished into the carriage again. It was only there that I noticed it wasn't entering the passenger compartment... It was actually the driver! A Golem controlling a Golem seemed a little weird at first, but then I remembered our Over Gears worked in a pretty similar manner.

The Golem carriage moved surprisingly swiftly. I noticed that it stomped over the stone road without causing any damage either... Perhaps the legs were rubber-tipped or something? There wasn't much jostling inside the carriage, so there was at least some impressive shock absorption built into the design.

Eventually, we made it to the castle...and it was even more impressive up close. The white walls were covered in sprawling ivy, there were trees dotted around the surrounding land, and that single gigantic tree towered over everything. The area looked like the perfect image of nature's bounty.

Apparently, the castle was over four thousand years old, but it didn't look it at all. That was probably the work of some kind of long-lasting

protection magic. The interior of the castle was a little dated, but not terribly so.

Once we hopped off the carriage, we followed King Rhea and his crown through a hallway. I got the distinct impression we weren't heading to the inside of the castle itself, however... It felt more like we were walking right *through* the castle to the back...or something.

Judging from the smirk on the king's face, I had a feeling he might be planning something sneaky. We eventually came to a huge door at the end of the hall. As we approached, two elven guards pushed it open with all their might.

"Whoa!"

"What?!"

"Wow..."

The door creaked open, revealing a stunning sight. It opened out into a forest clearing, the sun beating down brightly from above.

We were right in front of that massive tree I'd seen earlier...and it was even more terrifyingly large up close.

"This is Rheawind, the spirit tree. It was the Mothertree to we elves, the place where our souls once returned to."

...Once returned to?

I closed my eyes, but couldn't feel the presence of any spirits like I had in the Sea of Trees. I couldn't feel much of anything at all, strangely enough... It had no life force at all.

"I take it you've noticed already. This spirit tree is dead. She died of old age not too long ago. It has enough residual magic to still look magnificent for now, but in the coming months, it'll lose its luster and finally wilt away."

I see... And a tree that reaches the end of its natural lifespan can't be brought back with magic. It must have been here for thousands of years, watching over Rhea... Honestly, I feel lucky just getting to see this thing.

"Rheawind has done her job admirably...but the spirit tree is a vital fixture in my nation. Should we be left without one, my people will be unable to rest easily. Thus, we must seek out a new spirit tree."

"A new one?"

"Indeed. That's why I sought you out, Grand Duke Brunhild. For it was you who created Isengard's Puretree, was it not? You are surely capable of helping us."

"...Huh?"

Isengard's Puretree... I remember planting that thing to purify the venom from the wicked god, yeah. It wasn't me who made it, though... It was Uncle Kousuke, the god of agriculture... What does he want me to do, exactly? Uproot the one in Isengard and fly it over here or something?

"Oh, just so we're on the same page here, I don't specifically want Isengard's Puretree. I simply want a tree with similar properties for my own nation."

"Hm, I see..."

The tree was created after a lot of trial and error, so there were actually a lot of similar saplings in my **[Storage]**. Still, it was the creation of another god, so I was hesitant to just give something like that away without asking for permission first.

"Please give me a moment... I need to confer on this," I said that and quickly backed up to call Kousuke. It would hinge on whether or not the god of agriculture agreed.

“No prob here, kid. It’s basically a mortal plant, since it don’t really do nothin’ other than purify the air,” Uncle Kousuke replied. He was pretty to the point with his answer.

...Just like that, huh?

I shrugged. If he said it was fine, it was fine.

I took out a Puretree sapling from **[Storage]**, prompting King Rhea to look over it with amazement. He was literally shaking.

“M-my word... Gods above... It’s as if a very god resides within this plant! I’ve never felt such spiritual purity!”

He was exaggerating a bit, but it was definitely a beautifully pure plant. Or...maybe he just knew more than I did about divine gardening.

The sapling gave off little glittery particles. Each one was a small burst of purified magic power. There weren’t as many of the particles as there were with the other Puretree, however. It took in polluted air and mana from the atmosphere, but there wasn’t as much of that here as there was in Isengard... Well, that was just my guess at least, anyway. It could easily have been that it was just too immature to do its job properly yet.

I handed the sapling over to King Rhea, who was so ecstatic that I was almost worried he’d drop it.

“You have my thanks, Grand Duke... It’s my desire to see my nation build stronger bridges with Brunhild from now on.”

“Don’t worry. It’s my pleasure, really.”

The king shook my hand with great fervor. He looked about to cry. He then turned and looked at the towering tree behind him.

“Rheawind... O Mothertree, you who have watched over our nation for so long, you may rest in peace now. Thank you.”

Grun held a hand out toward the spirit tree. And then...a green pulse shot out from the Gollem's arm, impacting the side of the tree.

"Touya, look!"

"What?"

Yumina pointed up at the tree, and I noticed what she was looking at. Its color, which had once been vibrant, was rapidly fading away.

It was as if I was watching a movie on fast-forward. The very life drained out of the tree. Its branches and the main trunk itself began withering and crumbling. The massive plant before us was wasting away into dust.

...Is this Grun's crown skill, maybe?!

Once the spirit tree had finished crumbling away on the winds, King Rhea approached the spot it had once resided. He then crouched down and planted the new sapling.

"From old life doth fresh life spring anew...for that is the blessing of nature!"

"Huh?!"

"What the—?!"

As the king spoke, the tree he'd planted began rapidly growing. I couldn't believe my eyes! I stared on in absolute disbelief as it just kept on growing and growing. Branches gnarled, flowers bloomed, leaves spread out, and the trunk kept on thickening.

Is this Grun's power too?!

"So this is Vegetative Dominion... It's a power that can control not only plants, but processed material like lumber as well. This is Grand Grun's crown skill!"

Quun seemed just as surprised as me to see it in action, but at least she could explain what it was.

I knew it! But wait, doesn't this thing come at a cost to the user?!



“Gah!”

I panicked as the pained groans of King Rhea reached my ears. The Puretree in front of us was now half the size of the original spirit tree. Grun had finally stopped wielding that green beam too.

King Rhea staggered forward, stumbled, and fell to his knees. He then fell face-first into the dirt.

Using a crown ability too much can kill you... Is he okay?!

“H-Hey, you okay?!”

I ran over to him and flipped him over onto his back, only to hear a very peculiar sound echo out from his stomach. It sounded like a long, loud growl.

Huh?

The elf king looked up toward the sky. His eyes were glazed over as he mumbled, “...Hungry... Need food...”

...I-Is THAT the price?!

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“The green crown’s penalty is hunger. It can lead to starvation and even death in some cases. Though I have no plans to use my abilities to that degree, of course,” the elf king was resting in his bed as he spoke. His eyes were still glazed over, and his stomach rumbled fairly frequently.

The logical thing to do in a situation like this would be to get up and eat, but apparently that wasn’t an option for him. When King Rhea picked up an apple and brought it to his mouth...it simply crumbled away to dust.

I can’t believe what I’m seeing!

“It’s part of the price, you see... I won’t be able to eat any food until a certain timer expires. Given how much of my Gollem’s power I employed this time, I’ll likely have to go without food for twenty days...”

“Seriously?!”

“We elves are a race that can survive a while without food, so you needn’t worry about me on that front. I can still drink water, after all. It’s just the initial hunger pangs that are troubling.”

Nia, the red crown’s partner, told me something like that once. She said that pretty much every crown except purple could be used without dying if you were smart about it.

Though the purple crown’s negative effects were thankfully neutralized by my **[Cracking]** spell.

But seriously...his food turns to dust too? That’s way too cruel.

It reminded me of a story I’d read once. It was about this king who was granted the ability to turn everything he touched into gold. But unfortunately for him, that extended to his food as well.

The “price” you paid to use a crown’s power really did seem more like a curse that deprived the human partner of something important. But since it was a curse willingly undertaken in exchange for power, it probably wasn’t easily lifted. I didn’t think my **[Recovery]** would be able to cut it, even. I could probably use **[Cracking]** to get rid of Grun’s abilities entirely, but I highly doubted the king wanted that.

“Fret not. I’ve been using this power for a very, very long time, so I’m used to it now. I know exactly what my limits are, so I’m careful not to cross the threshold into serious danger.”

According to Quun, the green crown could manipulate plant life over a wide area. But as the range increased, so too did the effectiveness of the manipulation. In that regard, it was similar to my **[Prison]** skill.

It wasn't just limited to living plant life either. Processed wood was also under Grun's control. Apparently, she'd once destroyed a vast fleet of invading ships by twisting them into scraps of seaweed. I personally thought it'd be easier to just make holes in the ships, though...

"Why use the power to make the tree grow, then? It would've started growing on its own anyway."

"That tree is a symbol of my nation. It must be visible to ensure peace of mind for all my citizens. It's clear to anyone at a glance that a strong, thick trunk is a more striking vision than a frail sapling."

I mean, I guess... I can see it pretty clearly out the window right now, and there are already a few people praying to it...so he's probably right.

The people of his nation must've known that their tree was dying out, so they probably all pinned their hopes on a new tree sprouting soon. In the end, the king sacrificed his own comfort for his people's. That couldn't have been easy.

Not eating for a full twenty days would be rough for just about anyone. Even if he was familiar with it at this point, I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to get used to that.

"Grand Duke Brunhild. I can't possibly thank you enough...and neither can my people. But I'd still like to offer you something in the way of compensation. My country is home to many ancient ruins and relics... We also have a great many unearthed technologies stored within our treasury. I'd like to offer you some."

"No, that won't be necessary. I'm just happy to—"

“What a brilliant idea, Your Majesty! I’d be most keen to look over some of these treasures alongside the grand duke!”

Uncle Kousuke was the one responsible for the sapling, so I didn’t think it was my place to claim a reward. However, Quun didn’t seem to feel that way, as she immediately jumped forward with gleaming eyes.

...You’re coming on a little strong, you know? Try to dial it back a bit!

“Er... Right that way, then. He’ll show you to our treasury.”

“Okay.”

We were greeted by another (seemingly) young elf, who introduced himself as the prime minister. He walked with us to the treasury.

We left King Rhea behind to chug plenty of water and get some rest. Apparently, drinking and sleeping were mostly what he did during his fasting periods, since it made him feel less hungry. I made a mental note to bring him some of Lu’s cooking once his timer expired.

Prince Robert of Panaches was still unconscious, so we figured we’d grab whatever treasure Quun wanted, then hang out for a bit.

I wanted to extend an offer to join the alliance, but it didn’t feel right doing it while the king was bedridden. Thus, I decided to ask him later on instead.

“Here we are.”

We found ourselves in front of a heavy-looking door guarded by two massive Golems. There were a great many locks on it too. But thankfully, the prime minister had a great many keys.

Once the door was opened, we were treated to the sight of piles of gold and silver, as well as various interesting machines scattered around. There were plenty of Golems as well. They looked to all be

legacy models. There was no way a nation would keep standard factory models stored away in their treasury, after all.

Most of us calmly looked at the machines, Gollems, and scattered parts. It all looked like junk to me, but I wasn't exactly the expert here. My daughter Quun, on the other hand, dashed around the room like it was on fire. Her cheeks were flushed, she balled her hands up into fists, and she was one open mouth away from making a noise that would've probably sounded something like "Squee!" It was honestly pretty cute.

"Fathe— Er, Your Highness, um... Can I, you know?!"

"Uh... Sure, whatever. Pick anything you like."

"Thanks so much! I love you!" Quun yelled that and charged forward to give me a huge hug. I was about to hug her back, but she quickly let go and barreled back into the depths of the treasury.

...Why do I hear boss music?

"Our darling's being a touch doting today... Don't you agree, Yumina?"

"Quite right, Leen. A national leader must conduct himself more seriously, should he not?"

"R-Right..."

Yumina and Leen sandwiched me, pressing their sides uncomfortably against both of mine.

I wasn't being that doting, was I...? Well, it wasn't my fault! How could I possibly say no?!

After all that business, we headed back to Brunhild castle. Quun skipped down the hallway with her treasure in hand. It was about the size of a basketball and looked like some kind of engine, but I couldn't be sure. It had to be metal, but it seemed surprisingly light... When I picked it up, it felt light enough to be made of plastic, even.

“So, what exactly is that device?”

“Thank you for asking, mother! This happens to be a spirit kiln!”

“A spirit kiln?”

I’d never heard of that before. Quun went on to explain that while G-Cubes formed the heart and power source of a Golem, they required a magical spark to actually get that going. And apparently, spirit kilns were the source of said spark in ancient times.

All things had spirits in them, after all. The kiln simply allowed one to harness a spirit’s power to amplify it within a machine. The western continent was far less magically oriented than the east, but it still had spirits. Before things were more automated, the ancients of the Reverse World used spirits to move their Golems directly.

“The Golems from back then are different to the ones now, of course. The modern notion of a Golem was born only during their great war.”

“Huh, so that kiln thing’s from a time before the Phrase invasion happened over here...”

Judging by the condition of it, I couldn’t believe it was over five thousand years old. Did it have protective magic on it or something? Then again, some of our Frame Gears were that old and they were fine...

“Now I can analyze this ancient technology and unfurl secrets yet unknown! Mua ha ha ha ha!”

“Our daughter’s...a little scary, isn’t she?”

“She certainly is, dear. But that’s just how she’s wired.”

Leen and I looked over at Quun with troubled expressions on our faces. I personally felt that a laugh that evil should never be shown to one’s parents...

“Now then, off to Babylon for me!”

“Be sure you’re back down for dinner.”

“Okaaaay!”

Quun merrily skipped off toward Babylon. That girl sure was something. When it came to her hobbies, she was like a devil in girl form.

I sighed quietly and shook my head, only for Yumina to do the same.

“She’s terribly cute, isn’t she? I hope my own child comes soon...”

“Whatever do you mean, Yumina? Is she not your child? They’re all siblings, aren’t they?”

Leen’s words caused Yumina to pause for a moment, but then she smiled and let out a small chuckle.

“You’re quite right. I’m her mother as well, aren’t I?”

Quun had referred to Yumina as such earlier, even, which was only natural. She’d had nine mothers since the moment she was born. I highly doubted that the ties of biology mattered much to our kids when it came to their moms. Quun was fond of teasing all of them, not just Leen. Though I got the feeling she still tormented Leen just a little bit more than the rest.

I could still understand Yumina’s feelings, however. It was frustrating knowing your kid was out there somewhere, but not knowing when they’d actually show up.

I’d secretly ordered Kougyoku to have her servants act as lookouts for anything unusual in all the major cities. That was mostly for finding Yakumo if she happened to show up, though... She was the hardest to track, since she could freely use **[Gate]** and all.

Frankly, her actions confused me. If she wanted to train, then what better place to do it than the country that was home to Moroha and Yae herself? As a father, I just didn't get it.

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It'd been about a week since I visited the Kingdom of Rhea. Quun hadn't come down from Babylon at all since that trip. She and Elluka were apparently hard at work on something deep inside the research laboratory. That girl of mine was clearly an indoor person... Or rather, she had the makings of an extreme recluse.

Frei, on the other hand, was a total outdoor person. But she tended to only really do things with Ende's daughter, Allis.

"By the way...wasn't there supposed to be some kind of tournament in Mismede?" I turned toward Linze as I asked that, hoping she'd have an answer to my question. It was lunchtime, so we were seated at the dining table alongside Elze, Sakura, and Sue.

The other girls had other things to attend to, so it was just us. That wasn't too uncommon an occurrence, and everyone was perfectly fine going about like that.

"It started today, I believe. Isn't that right, sis?"

"That's right. Bwuh, I wish I was competing..." Elze grumbled to herself as she ate her omelet. I could understand her annoyance, but it was better for her not to compete in things like that.

Elze, Yae, and Hilde were among the strongest people in the world. I felt like the only non-gods that could defeat them at this point were long-lived dwarven or elven individuals who'd dedicated thousands of years to training.

"Well, I guess it's fine not to compete... A foreign royal showing up for Mismede's contest might be frowned on."

"Yeah, you're right... It's not easy being a grand duchess."

The beastking had always wanted to host a grand martial arts tournament in Mismede, but his advisors constantly vetoed it by citing budget issues. But after they saw the tournament in Brunhild and realized how much money we must've raked in from the food stalls and other such things, they realized they could just as easily do the same thing. From there it was just a matter of getting the go-ahead from Royal Chancellor Glatz.

I made sure to help them out with warding and recovery magic, though. Better safe than sorry, after all.

Since this was the first tournament, it was apparently limited to Mismedians, but I had a feeling there'd be more participants in future bouts. Especially after the magic train got running properly.

I wondered if the beastking himself would be participating... When he joined in on our tourney, he fought Belfast's General Leon to a draw. I never actually saw the fight myself, since I was unconscious due to my encounter with Gila, but I heard it was one to remember. If only someone had recorded it...

"If she can't participate, could she at least go watch?"

"Hmm... The beastking probably wouldn't have an issue with that, but..."

Sue's words troubled me slightly. I wasn't entirely sure if it'd go so smoothly if Elze actually went there. I had a feeling that the tournament winner or maybe even the beastking himself would challenge Elze to an exhibition match at the end or something. It'd be a real pain if one of Brunhild's royals beat up either the winner of their first tournament or the king himself...

I personally felt like we should just give up on going to the Mismede tournament this year. But just as I was about to voice my thoughts, I received a telepathic message from Kougyoku.

«I apologize for interrupting your meal, my lord, but I've received important intel from one of my scouts. I'd implore you to take a look for yourself.»

«Sure. Patch me through.»

My optic nerve was magically linked to one of the birds under Kougyoku's command.

Darkness engulfed my vision for a brief moment, but then it was replaced by a sight not my own. I was seeing through the bird's eyes.

Huh...? Where is this? There sure are a lot of people... Is this a venue hall? There's a bunch of demi-humans... Is this Mismede? Oh, yep. It's Mismede. There's the chancellor over there, and that's the fighting ring that I cast a ward on the other day. It's the tournament hall.

The venue was stacked with beastmen. It was quite the sight, really. Seemed like the event had drawn a considerable crowd.

The bird's gaze suddenly shifted to the middle of the arena itself. Someone was fighting... It seemed like the tournament itself was ongoing. One of the fighters was a massive, bearded man with a huge wooden sword. He was some kind of bear beastman, probably. As for his opponent...

"Wh—?!"

A clatter rang out as I stood up and knocked my chair to the floor. Everyone stared at me, but I could only look back at one of my wives... Linze.

She was the spitting image of the girl I'd just seen fighting in the arena.

"Wh-What's going on, Touya?!"

"N-Nothing, it's just... Well, I got a message and... Ugh... It'll be faster if I just show you!" I said that, then quickly cast **[Mirage]** to project

the image of what I was seeing over in Mismede. The scene now played out above the dining table. There was no sound, though. It was like a muted video.

“...Huh?”

“What is this, an arena?”

“Wait, is that kid fighting?”

“Is that Linze?”

The girl looked to be about seven. She wore a heavy gauntlet on each hand, and she was giving the large bear beastman a serious run for his money.

She charged in like a furious bolt, prompting her foe to respond by turning the broad side of his blade toward her. But she saw through his maneuver and suddenly jumped upward, zigzagging through the air above him... I could only stare in awe, unsure how she was even doing that. It was like she was jumping off invisible platforms. She then wound back her fist and brought it crashing down against the man’s sword, splintering it to pieces. The bearman was blasted back with it, falling out of the ring. He bounced a few times before smashing into a wall.

Everyone at the table cried out in sheer shock. We couldn’t believe what we were seeing... Just how powerful was she? Elze looked at the girl on the video, then at her sister. Then she looked back and forth a few times.

“C-Could it be...? Could that really be...?!”

“I think it’s Linze’s daughter... Linne.”

“They look really similar, yep. It’s gotta be her.”

Sakura and Sue both nodded in unison. They really did look similar... Though, that was probably to be expected.

She had shoulder-length silvery hair, along with a headband that resembled Linze's. Her eyes, on the other hand, made me think more of Elze at a glance...but she was wearing clothing much closer to Linze's. It was honestly like looking at a miniature Linze.

"Awawawah?! Sh-She's here?! Sh-She's arrived?! She's real?!"

"What are you asking now...?"

"Uhm... Ah... Ahhh! C-Calm down! Deep breaths! Wh-What is this?! Wh-What?! Sh-She's really..."

"Calm down, Linze."

She was completely freaking out. I definitely understood why, though. The only reason I was so composed was because it'd happened a few times to me already.

"Ah! Look!"

"Huh?"

I heard Elze squeal, then turned back to look at the display. Linne was waving her hand out toward the audience and celebrating her win. But then I noticed the other small girl in the audience raise her hand in turn, waving back to the winner.



“She looks just like Elze...”

“That must be Elna, yep!”

“Wh-Whah?! Sh-She’s here?! Sh-She’s real?!”

Elze started sweating profusely in response to Sakura and Sue. Her eyes started darting around frantically. The room’s atmosphere had quickly shifted to one of pure panic, and both twins were now flustered beyond words.

“Uhm... Ah... Ahhh... Wh-What do I do? C-Calm down! Ah! Wh-What is this?! Wh-Whaaaaaat?!”

“Elze, calm down... Wait, didn’t we just do this?”

She was acting just as freaked out as Linze had been earlier. They really were alike...

The girl in the audience had long silvery hair. She resembled Elze in a great many ways...except for the eyes. They reflected a softness and maturity that her mother was somewhat lacking in. She wore clothing similar to Elze’s, as well. Perhaps future Linze made them for her?

“T-Touya! We gotta go to Mismede, now!”

“Th-That’s right! Why are we staring at the projection?! We need to get going!”

“Okay, okay. Calm down...”

I was powerless against just one yelling wife, so the combined force of two was enough to bring me to my knees. I quickly opened up a **[Gate]** to the arena, allowing us to exit in a quiet corner of the spectator stands.

Elze and Linze practically dashed through after me, while Sakura and Sue came through in a more orderly fashion.

We watched Linne leave the ring and head for a nearby antechamber. Linze immediately started charging after her, so I had no choice but to grab her arm and stop her from making a fuss.

“Hold on! She’s still a tournament participant. If you go into the waiting room and see her without permission, you might cause trouble.”

“B-But...”

“Why don’t we hold off on Linne for now and go see Elna in the audience? That way she’ll end up coming to us anyway, yeah?” Sue’s words caused Linze to reluctantly nod in agreement.

“Uhm... Where is she...? Oh, there!” Elze pointed out Elna, who was sitting rather far away from us. She was on the front row, on the opposite side of the arena.

I was surprised she managed to pick the girl out from the bustling crowd, but maybe that was just a mother’s intuition at work. We’d have to circle the arena to reach her... Just as I was about to break into a light jog, I heard Elze speak up from behind me.

“Sakura! Please use **[Teleport]!**”

“Sure.”

My vision changed in a flash.

Ack! Wait, you idiots!

Apparently, being exposed to my divinity gave Sakura the added perk of being able to teleport multiple people within a certain radius. We materialized on the other side of the ring, causing some nearby people to jump back in shock.

We’re supposed to be keeping a low profile, dammit!

In the midst of the sudden chaos, I could only focus on one thing. The confused eyes of the young girl who was looking up and over at us.

“Mommy?” Elna’s gaze was focused solely on Elze.

“U-Uh... E-Elna?”

“Ahhh! Waaah!”

Upon hearing her own name come from Elze’s mouth, Elna’s expression shifted. Her eyes welled up with tears almost immediately.

“Mommy! It’s youuu! Waaaaaah! Snff... Waaah! I missed you! I was so scared!” Elna bolted forward, clinging to Elze’s side and sobbing like a child... But given that she was one, that was reasonable.

Elze was clearly taken aback by the sudden hug, but she quickly composed herself and pulled little Elna into a tender embrace.

Uh...I’m here too, you know? You know, your dad? H-Hello...?

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Elna was crying a lot, so we left the venue hall to help calm her down. Once we got out of there, we sat down on a nearby bench and listened to her recount the story of what had happened.

“So wait, you landed at the Great Gau River?!”

“Mhm... We were on a bridge in Mismede, but it was all rotten and it collapsed...so I fell with Linne...”

“A-are you okay?! You aren’t hurt, are you?!” Elze suddenly panicked, patting her hands gently around her daughter’s body. Elna giggled quietly at that.

“It’s okay. We didn’t fall in the water, but we lost our phones in there...so we couldn’t call anyone...”

That explained a lot. The mass-produced smartphones were enchanted with **[Apport]** and **[Teleport]** to prevent them from getting lost or stolen, but that depended on me actually triggering the magic. Without me, there was nothing the two girls could do.

“We decided we needed to find our way to Brunhild when we heard about the tournament...and, well, we thought maybe we could ask the beastking for help...”

“Wow! You’re so smart! That’s my girl!” Elze said that and gave Elna a big hug, rubbing her cheek up against the girl’s own. Elna’s cheeks turned beet red in response.

Heh... I get it. They look just like Elze and Linze, so I’m sure the beastking would contact me if he met them. Even if I hadn’t come here, I probably would’ve gotten a call about it by tomorrow.

But there was a bit of a problem. The mass-produced smartphones were marked with serial numbers, and that was how I recalled any lost ones to me. However, I didn’t know the serial numbers for their phones, since they were from the future. And because the serial numbers were supposed to be secret, the girls didn’t know their own either.

It was kind of a pain, but I figured I’d just use **[Search]** to track them down later.

As I mulled that over, Sue suddenly spoke up, asking, “How old are you and Linne?”

“We’re both seven...but I’m the older one, by a month!”

Apparently, Elna was my sixth child, and Linne was the seventh. Quun was the third...so that meant there were two other kids between them. There were also two younger than Linne.

I didn’t know which of those were Yumina’s, Lu’s, Sue’s, or Sakura’s, however.

Sue and Sakura pressed for info on their kids, but Elna didn’t relent. She mentioned that Granny Tokie told her not to speak too much about the future.

Elze noticed how ravenous for information the two women were and quickly shut them down. Sue and Sakura took their defeat with a small sigh, but they gave up for the time being.

At that moment, a funny sound rang out. It was a little growl from Elna's tummy. I raised a brow and saw the little girl clutching her stomach. Her cheeks were flushed.

"O-Oh, we haven't gotten to eat yet..."

"Well, we were actually in the middle of lunch when we noticed you were here. Let's grab a bite to eat. Excuse me, three skewers for each of us, please!"

"Coming right up!"

Sue turned around and ordered us a ton of chicken skewers. There was an absolute mountain of food in my **[Storage]**, but it wasn't bad to partake in local cuisine every once in a while. Besides, it was a festival, so taking the chance to eat stall food was part of the fun. Thus, I took a skewer and handed it off to Linze.

"Here you go."

"Oh, thanks..." Linze mumbled before smiling softly. I could tell she was a bit worried about Linne, though. Her smile was weaker than usual as she looked over at Elze and Elna sitting with each other.

"It'll be okay. She's your daughter... I know she'll win... Don't worry, Linze."

"Thank you, Sakura..." Linze replied, her smile brightening a little upon hearing those words. Sakura was right. She had to have strength on the level of a gold or silver adventurer. If anything, she might even have been able to win the whole tournament...which would've been a huge problem.

"Since we've found the girls, should we get Linne to drop out?"

“Um... I don’t think you can do that, dad...” Elna quietly mumbled in my direction. She felt a little more distant compared to how close she was with Elze...but I chose to believe she was just shy about how she’d been crying. Having a daughter who wasn’t comfortable around me would make me sad.

“Linne loves contests like this. If she loses she’ll be upset, but if she gets pulled out she’ll be even sadder... She’ll cry if you do that... She’ll probably cry if she just loses normally...”

Oh... Guess she’s really childish.

Quun and Frei were mature for their ages, so it might have given me unrealistic expectations of my kids.

“Hmm... The problem is this is Mismede’s first tournament. It’s a milestone event for them, you know? It’d be one thing for a normal person from another country to win, but a foreign royal might be a bit much...”

I didn’t plan to tell anyone Linne was related to me, but she looked so much like Linze that it’d be an uphill battle convincing anyone otherwise. Even if we said she was a cousin or something, that still wouldn’t be a good look.

It wouldn’t be a problem if she lost in the tournament, but I didn’t know if it’d be a good idea for her to fight to the finals... My feelings were ultimately mixed. As a father, I’d have loved to see her win, but as a national leader, I knew it’d complicate matters. After all, I knew the people of Mismede would prefer to have someone from their country win the tournament.

“Oh, that reminds me... Does Linne have anything up her sleeve? Any Null spells, maybe?”

“Oh, yeah. She does! She has **[Gravity]**,” Elna bluntly answered Elze’s question.

Oh... Now I see... Yeah... That'll do it.

That was an ability I used a lot. You could use it to increase the force of your weapon at the last second before impact. In Linne's case, she probably couldn't use it remotely via her phone like I did, so she was directly manipulating the weight of the gauntlets she was constantly in physical contact with.

"Can you use magic in this tournament?"

"So long as it's not recovery magic or direct attacks, you can. There was **[Tailwind]** in the last match," Elna answered Sue's question.

***[Tailwind]**... That's a Wind spell that boosts your speed, right? I don't use it often, but it's like a mix of **[Accel]** and **[Boost]**.*

"When Linne was walking through the air earlier...was that magic?" Sakura asked Elna what I was thinking.

"She was using **[Shield]** to make mid-air platforms to bounce off. They're not visible, so it looks like she's walking..."

*She's using **[Shield]** like that?! That's smart, since you can create small ones that vanish after a few seconds. I should actually give that a go at some point. But my daughter with Linze has **[Shield]** and **[Gravity]**, huh? Two Null spells...*

As if sensing my thoughts, Elna spoke up and informed me of the spells she was capable of using. She could use **[Boost]**, **[Multiple]**, and **[Recovery]**. Upon hearing that her daughter could use the same Null spell she could, Elze broke out into a huge smile.

Quun could use **[Program]**, Elna had **[Boost]**...and Sakura's daughter Yoshino apparently had **[Teleport]** as well. I wondered if that meant there really was a genetic aspect to Null magic...

"So, uh, what are we gonna do about Linne?"

"I could yank her to us with **[Teleport]** if you like..."

"No, don't do that."

Sakura's suggestion felt like a bit much to me. I didn't want to make my daughter cry the first time I met her.

"If she loses she'll stop, right? Why not have the Beastking put her up against someone really strong?"

"Hm... It'd have to be someone extremely strong, though... She beat that big guy pretty easily."

"How about you use **[Mirage]** on me? Then I can fight her! It seems like she's one of my students alongside Allis, so it might be fun!"

Elze's suggestion seemed a little too extreme, but I didn't know if we could trust the beastking or his staff to handle this delicate situation.

"If she's your student, then she might be able to tell it's you because of your fighting style, Elze... I guess I'll just have to—"

"I'll do it," Linze raised her hand, speaking in a small yet clear voice.

"Huh?"

"Looking at my sis bonding with Elna, I... I want to get close to my daughter too."

Can that really be considered bonding? I'm not entirely sure if challenging her to a duel is the same as hugging her...

"But you're a mage, Linze. How are you gonna fight her?"

"The rules say I can't use magic to hurt my opponent, but there are ways around that. I'm trained in many arcane aspects, after all."

Linze wasn't as physically strong as most of the others, but that didn't mean she was weak. In all honesty, she was far, far beyond your average adventurer. She'd spent a long time in Babylon's library studying ancient magic, compound spells, and even spirit magic. She was also further empowered by the wedding ring, since it was a gift from God Almighty.

“Hey, Elna. Linne’s the type to get carried away, isn’t she? Did she say this tournament was going to be an easy win?”

“Y-Yes...she said exactly that... How did you know?”

“Hee hee... I’ve heard it before. Plenty of times from my sister when we were growing up, in fact.”

“L-Linze! N-Not in front of my daughter!”

Elze flailed her arms as her cheeks flushed red. I couldn’t help but chuckle at that.

“I think it’s my duty as a mother to know how far my daughter’s coming along. Is that okay, Touya?”

“It’s fine by me, yeah...”

I wasn’t sure Linze could beat Linne in a straight physical match, though. This wouldn’t be like Hilde’s duel with Frei. Still, I had faith that Linze would be able to think of a way to make her daughter submit without either side suffering harm... That seemed more her style, after all.

My phone suddenly vibrated in my breast pocket, so I pulled it out. It was a call from Royal Chancellor Glatz...of Mismede...

“Uhhh, hello?”

“Oh, Grand Duke? Are you perhaps in Mismede?”

“Er, yes... How’d you know?”

“Ha ha ha hah... I thought I saw you and a few of your companions from my viewing box. Would you care to join me up here?”

If I recalled correctly, Glatz’s box was a VIP area on a higher floor. He was a bird beastman, so that probably explained his keen eyesight from such a distance.

I shrugged my shoulders and accepted the invite. This next match would surely be one to remember.

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“Huh? Where’s Elna...? Did she go to pick some flowers?” Linne peeked out from the waiting room and gazed into the crowd. Her sister, who was usually the type to stay by her side, was nowhere to be found. She felt a little uneasy. The fact that she didn’t have her phone on hand weighed on her mind more heavily than ever before.

The contestants were all sitting in the room. They were either meditating, resting, stretching, or preparing for the next round in their own ways.

Linne included, there were a total of twelve contestants. Two of them had been injured, so they were resting in the infirmary. Healing magic could do so much. If you sustained a severe enough injury, you’d have no choice but to withdraw. Magic couldn’t help a person recover lost blood, for example. And spells that recovered fatigue were incredibly rare.

If someone ended up withdrawing due to their injury, then their allotted matches would become auto-forfeits. Linne was indifferent, but most of the other contestants were hoping the two injured parties would bow out.

In addition to the twelve in the waiting room, four individuals were admitted into the final bouts on special recommendations. In other words, sixteen individuals would be competing for the championship title, so sixteen people were waiting to show off their skills to Beastking Jamukha Blau Mismede.

If someone caught the beastking’s eye, they could end up being called to serve him in an official capacity. It was no wonder the contestants were keen to have any potential competition drop out.

After a short while, the door to the waiting room opened once more. In walked three individuals. First up was the beastman referee who oversaw the matches, then came one of the two contestants who went to the infirmary, and finally came an individual nobody in the room recognized.

“Ser Bale has decided his injuries are too extreme for him to continue. Therefore, we’ve added a new contestant to the battle roster. This is Linlin.”

“Oh, hello. I’m Linlin. Nice to meet you all...”

The new contestant, Linlin, timidly introduced herself. The fighters sighed, seeing that their easy win slot had been filled.

Linlin looked to be about fifteen or sixteen. She had braided blonde hair. There was a wand at her waist with a pretty star on the end, as well as a similar star-shaped badge pinned to her chest. She didn’t wear any armor, instead opting for a gothic black coat and a multilayered skirt with black knee socks on her legs.

It was obvious at a glance that she was a mage. In tournaments like this, direct magical attacks were forbidden. That meant seeing mages participate was a rare sight, but it wasn’t completely unheard of. There were even a few magic users in the waiting room.

“Now then, Linlin. Shall I show you to the room for the specially recommended candidates?”

“Oh, no... I think I’ll be fine here. It’s a touch too intense over there...”

“Hm? I see... Well, as you wish.”

The referee seemed rather puzzled, but he decided to abide by her request. He didn’t wish to hamper the contestant’s potential by putting her in a nervous position, after all. She was personally suggested by Royal Chancellor Glatz, so she was surely a formidable

fighter, but it would be difficult for a mage to win a contest like this. Therefore, if she believed sitting in the waiting room with the others would give her a better chance, he thought there was no point in contesting that.

“Now, you’ll all have to wait just a little longer before we begin again.”

With that, the referee left the room. Everyone’s attention turned to the girl named Linlin, but the reactions to her were rather mixed. Some weren’t all that interested, since she was just a spellcaster, while others were alarmed. Some were cautious and a couple even narrowed their eyes in annoyance. But in the midst of the commotion, one of the contestants stood a small distance away. She was quiet, her eyes fixed on Linlin, looking her up and down... The girl in question was, of course, Linne.

“Wh-What is it?”

“Umm...have we met before, lady?”

“Huh?! N-No way!”

“Really? Oh... Okay, then! Wanna sit with me?” Linne smiled as she patted the chair next to her and asked that question. Linlin sat down next to the girl, prompting Linne to jut her hand out with a big smile.

“I’m Linne Mochiz— Um, just Linne! You can call me Linne! Nice to meet you!”

“...Nice to meet you, Linne.”

Linlin smiled as she reached her hand out to shake Linne’s. As she shook her daughter’s hand, she tried to suppress her internal screaming.

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《A-Aaah! Sh-She's so cute! L-Linne's so cute! Th-This is my daughter with Touya?! She's adorable! I wanna cuddle her right now! I can't believe my daughter's this adorable! Nhaaaaaah!》

Linlin...or rather, Linze...felt her heart beating out of her chest. Meeting her daughter was one of the most intense things she'd ever done. The envious feelings she'd harbored toward her sister earlier were all but blown away. There was nothing she could do after seeing her little girl up close and personal. Cuteness was, after all, justice.

"Are you a mage, lady?"

"Y-Yes, I am. Is that strange?"

"No way! My mom's a mage and I know she's really, really strong! But I'll still win, okay?"

"I-Is that right..."

The sight of Linne proclaiming her victory so confidently was also surprisingly cute. Linze was struggling to hold herself back.

"Did you say your mother was a mage, Linne?"

"Mhm! She's the best! She can do magic, she can cook, and she makes clothes!"

Linze leaned in as she tried to coax as much information from her daughter as possible. As the conversation progressed, she moved to ask what she'd been really keen to know.

"L-Linne... Do you love your mother?"

"She gets real scary when she's mad, but I love her lots! She tells me stories when I go to bed. It's great! I'm gonna go see her with my sister Elna soon... I really wanna see her..." the girl's voice quietly trailed off. Linze suddenly leaned in and gave Linne a big hug.

“L-Lady?” Linne mumbled as she glanced up with a confused look on her face. Linze suddenly pulled back from the hug. She’d embraced the girl without thinking, and it surely must’ve seemed strange. She quickly fumbled around, searching for an excuse.

“Oh! S-Sorry! You just... You look like my sister, so I couldn’t help it...”

It was a bit of a weak excuse, but she decided to roll with it as best she could.

“You have a sister? I have sisters too! And a brother.”

Linne apparently didn’t notice anything amiss. She simply smiled and happily patted her chest. However, before Linze could pry for any information on Linne’s siblings, the door opened up again. The referee and two Mismede soldiers walked in.

“Thank you for waiting, everyone! We’ve decided on who’ll be fighting who. Take a look over the matchups, and we’ll call you out as and when you’re needed.”

The two soldiers pinned the matchup information on a nearby wall. The contestants all peered at the brackets, checking who they’d be fighting in the tournament-style rotation.

“Oh! Look, lady! You’re my first opponent!”

“So it seems.”

Linze wasn’t surprised, since she’d had Glatz arrange this in advance. She also planned on withdrawing if she won, either by feigning an injury or simply retiring. She could hardly afford to lose against her daughter here, though.

“You’re a mage, so I’ll go easy on you!”

“...Linne, I might not be too far off from your mother in terms of strength, you know? You’d best not take me lightly, okay?”

Linze had only intended to caution her daughter, but the younger girl responded with narrowed eyes and a few small grumbles. This prompted Linze to wonder if she'd wounded the girl's pride.

"...That's impossible. Nobody in my family's as tough as my mom, so that means you can't be tougher either! I'm definitely gonna beat you!"

Linze blinked in surprise, apparently not expecting to hear that. As a mother, she was happy that her daughter thought so highly of her...but she couldn't help but feel that her daughter still thought herself better. That only made Linze smile, however. She was just a child, after all. Elze was pretty much like that as well back when she was a child. In fact, the sight of Linne acting like that was so nostalgic that Linze couldn't help but giggle.

Upon seeing the chuckle, Linne made a little "Hmph!" and crossed her arms. She must have felt that Linlin was making light of her family. But even that little pouty routine was adorable to Linze. In the end, it simply reinforced the idea that she was absolutely her child.

"I'll be glad to meet you in combat, Linne."

"I won't lose! You can count on that!"

The mother and daughter exchanged grins, each set on their own victories.

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"Game set! The winner is Sir Dansk!"

The tiger beastman had beaten his foe by blasting him out of the ring with incredible force. He raised his fist high in victory, prompting the audience to roar out in applause.

“Beastmen are really strong... This guy’s a real fighter...” Elna, who was sitting next to Elze, couldn’t help but mumble praise. She was quite interested in the fighters, it seemed.

We were back in the spectator seats where we’d first met Elna. Glatz had suggested we watch from the VIP box, but I declined. I figured Linne would be worried if she looked out and didn’t see Elna.

Obviously, I still didn’t want any of us to be recognized, so I used **[Mirage]** on everyone who wasn’t from the future.

“When’s Linze fighting Linne?”

“Their fight should be up after this next one. I wonder if it’ll be all right, though... Honestly, I’m not sure which of the two I’m worried about most...”

I let out a small sigh, prompting Elze to glance over at me with a crooked brow.

“What’re you getting worried about all of a sudden? Linze is one of your wives, remember? She’s hardly a pushover. Hell, I think she has the most firepower out of all of us...”

“She can’t exactly make use of that firepower here, though... It’s in the rules. Er, not that I’d like to see her blast our daughter in the first place...”

As I spoke to Elze, Elna nestled between us and the crowd started cheering for the next match. It was a dragonewt man versus a swordswoman with canine traits. I could only hope the upcoming clash wouldn’t be too violent...

Frankly, I was so nervous about seeing Linze fight Linne that I could barely focus on the match in front of me. I groaned quietly and held my stomach.

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“Oh... Guess Elna’s back. Wonder who those people sitting with her are...” Linne couldn’t help but wonder as she looked over at her sister and the people talking over her.

She knew for a fact that Elna was shy. The girl wasn’t exactly the type to get along with strangers.

Linne was a little worried for a moment, but the look on Elna’s face calmed her down. Honestly, from the way they were laughing together...it was almost like they were family. It made her feel jealous.

Linlin...or rather, Linze...peeked out from behind her.

“That’s your sister?”

“Mhm... That’s my sister, Elna. It’s rare for her to get along with strangers.”

Poor Linne was lacking the critical information necessary to understand why her sister was on such friendly terms with these perceived strangers.

“Game set! Victory goes to Sir Ryugel!”

The referee announced the end of the battle. Unfortunately, I had barely noticed anything that had happened during the fight. I was far too distracted by my own concerns... But apparently, the winner was the dragon guy with the spear.

“Next up is the fifth match! This match features our specially recommended mage, Linlin! Her foe is the youngest contestant, Linne!”

After the announcement, the two girls stepped out from the waiting room. They were met by a hail of applause from the audience.

“Let’s play, lady! I’m gonna win!”

“Play, hm? Well, if this is a game...it’s one I don’t plan on losing.”

The two of them stared each other down as they headed to either side of the ring.

“Are you ready?”

“Sure am!”

“Mhm!”

Linne clanked her gauntlets together as Linze pulled up the wand from her side.

“Ready... Fight!”

Linne charged forward, attempting to close the gap between her and her foe. That was the simplest way to deal with mages. It was just a matter of getting close before they could start casting anything.

“Sorry, but I’m gonna win now!” Linne exclaimed as she charged forward, but she was forced to suddenly take a backstep.

“Shimmer forth, Light! Dazzling Brilliance: [Flash]!”

“Ack!”

The flash of light from Linze’s wand caused Linne to falter. The little girl brought her hands up to cover her eyes. The light was so intense that she couldn’t gaze directly at it.

Her chanting was way faster than I’d expected. I’d wondered what Linze would do without any direct offensive spells, but I hadn’t expected her to blind Linne.

“Grr?! Th-That’s no fair, lady!” Linne complained and furrowed her brow before promptly casting **[Shield]** around herself. Little by little, her eyesight began to return. She just had to hold out.

“You shouldn’t charge a mage head-on. You never know what weaknesses they might exploit with their tricks.”

“Weaknesses? Huh? Don’t go thinking you know how to beat me!”

When Linne's vision finally returned, she found that her foe was no longer in front of her. In a panic, she turned and looked all over. However, her foe was nowhere to be found.

"Huh?"

She thought perhaps her enemy was above her, but she looked up and saw nothing.

"She's vanished? Wait, no...can she cast the **[Invisible]** spell?! I know that one makes you disappear!"

"Correct."

Linne kept her **[Shield]** up behind her, scanning her surroundings for signs of life. She focused all her attention on the voice she'd heard, trying to best determine its origin. But suddenly, the referee interrupted things.

"J-Just a moment! Linne! Concealment magic of that magnitude isn't strictly forbidden by our rules, but we'd like to forbid it due to the unprecedented advantage you now seem to have!"

"Oh, very well. That's no problem."

"Wah!"

Linze suddenly materialized right next to Linlin, causing her to jump up in surprise. She was completely taken aback.

"Hah!"

However, it didn't take long for the girl to regain her composure. She sent a flying kick right at Linze, but...seconds before the kick struck Linze's stomach, a crack ran up her body.

"Huh?!"

The cracks ran up Linze until they connected...and she shattered into pieces that resembled glass.

“Wh-What the heck was that? A reflection?”

“I’m right here.”

Linne turned around just in time to see Linze swinging her wand down. The star-like tip of the weapon detached, flying forward like a shuriken.

The thick, distorted weapon hurtled toward Linne with all the force of a shooting star.

“Ghah!”

Linne suddenly crouched, just barely avoiding the attack. The star continued roaring through the air before completing an arc, much like a boomerang, and settling back on the end of Linze’s wand.

“What was that?! That’s against the rules!”

“Weapons aren’t direct magic attacks. It was more like a flail than anything else,” Linze explained and clicked her tongue before swinging her weapon forward again, sending the heavy star hurtling toward her daughter.

The attack wasn’t especially fast or anything. It wouldn’t be hard for Linne to dodge it, that much was certain. But the little girl apparently had other ideas, instead opting to deal with the problem permanently.

“Hmph... Nhah!” Linne grunted and thrust her right fist out at the incoming star. There was nothing, after all, that could avoid being shattered by the gauntlets she received from her beloved father. Especially when she could pour **[Gravity]** into her fist at the last possible second, granting her punch a devastating power. The approaching star burst on impact, shattering into pieces.

“How’s that?!” Linne exclaimed and grinned, puffing her little chest out with pride. Her mother couldn’t help but be impressed, flashing a

little smile at her. Linne, however, seemed to take the smile as further provocation. Her expression shifted to a frown right after.

“Don’t you look down on me! How’s this?!”

With a distinct stepping noise, Linne jumped up into the air and began walking through it as if she were performing some kind of triple jump. I knew the secret, of course. She was using **[Shield]** to create temporary footholds in the air. Linne was now a full head and shoulders above Linze, darting toward her.

“Meteor kiiick!”

The girl’s shoes, which were mithril plated at their soles, allowed her to hurtle down against Linze with the force of a meteor. Ordinarily, this kind of kick came at the risk of serious injury if not properly handled. But Linne knew her father was responsible for the creation of this arena. She knew that, much like Brunhild’s training grounds, this place had been designed to keep the fighters safe. Therefore, she had a vague idea of how much damage she could do within reasonable bounds.

She also bore in mind a lesson imparted to her from one of her mothers, Elze, who also served as her teacher. It was important to measure one’s own output during a fight. She was certain that she could land a hit like this and shrug it off. But she realized all too late that she’d been tricked yet again. Linze crumbled away into cracked mirror fragments once more.

She was confused, however. She’d heard no chanting. Was it a Null spell? Something innate? How was she casting these so quickly? After making a rough landing, Linne looked around for clues. Then, she found one.

A small figure that was about thirty centimeters in size stood before her. She vaguely resembled a doll. She wore a silver dress and had long silvery locks of hair.

“A spirit! I get it now! You were using spirit magic!”

“That she was, child. If you’d looked a little closer, you might have noticed me sooner. Bear this in mind for future conflicts,” the spirit floating next to Linze said that, then giggled quietly. Linne knew that there weren’t many people who could effectively wield spirit magic in this era... In fact, as far as she knew, nobody in Mismede knew how to make use of spirit magic. Thus, she’d barely even registered it as a possibility.

She knew her mother Linze could wield it. Along with Leen, Sakura, Yumina, Sue, and a few others. However, their use of the art was incredibly rare.

Linne herself had seen spirit magic before due to her parents casting it, but she’d never met this silvery spirit. But since it could communicate with her, and even laugh at her, she could only assume it was a fairly powerful one.

“This is a reflection spirit. Her name is Miroir.”

“Indeed, I’m Miroir. Pleased to meet you,” the doll-like girl gave a little curtsy as she greeted Linne.

The reason Linze had elected to use such a spirit was to preserve her secret identity. She’d learned from Elna that when she wielded spirit magic in the future, it was almost always with high-ranking spirits. It wouldn’t have made much of a difference overall, though. After all, Linze wasn’t actually capable of manipulating spirits of that power level yet.

“A reflection spirit... So you were making copies of yourself with it?!”

“That’s right. If you’d looked a little more closely, you’d have been able to tell.”

Suddenly, Linne realized something. When she first met Linlin in the waiting room, her star badge was on her left side...but this Linlin was wearing her star badge on her right!

“Wait, you’re another fake?!”

She turned to see Linze and Miroir standing behind her. This time her enemy had the badge on the correct side. The Linze she’d just been conversing with shattered like glass.

“Goodness, you actually noticed this time.”

“Grr! Don’t go trying to trick me with your spirit stuff!”

“I’d have to be a fool to play my whole hand at the beginning, wouldn’t I? Besides, I’m sure you’ve got tricks up your sleeve too, right?”

“Grrr! That’s right... I do! Mode Change... Panzer!”

All of a sudden, Linne’s gauntlets split down the middle. They began transforming, growing in size and warping into a new shape as they crawled along the girl’s arms. The gauntlets now had ether line patterns running down them, as well as what appeared to be exhaust vents that jutted out of the girl’s elbows.

“If you wanna see my full power, then here it comes! But don’t say I didn’t warn you!”

Linne’s body was garbed in a pure concentration of fighting spirit. Her very form began to emanate strength, the force mingling with the girl’s own magical power. Her mother couldn’t help but quietly stare in awe.

“This power...”

It was chi. The ability to infuse one’s own body with magic, thereby increasing one’s physical capabilities and even warping potential beyond standard limits. It was a secret technique passed down

among certain tribes in the eastern continent, including the dragonewt people.

From what Linze knew, both Allis and Linne were Elze's disciples in the future. She also knew that Allis was capable of releasing her own chi in a destructive burst when she fought. It stood to reason, then...that her own daughter, Linne, could be capable of equally catastrophic feats.

"Hah!"

"Ghah!"

Linne struck her palm forward, almost impacting Linze hard with a concentrated blast of chi. Fortunately, she managed to jump out of the way in time, but she felt the immense pressure graze her side.

"I'm not done!"

"W-Wait! I-Isn't this a bit much?!"

Linne refused to let up, unleashing pulse after pulse of concentrated chi blasts. Linze was, as expected, taken completely aback by that. It was hard to dodge the barrage when it was being fired off so rapidly. She couldn't even find the time to deploy defensive magic.

"M-Miroir, hurry!"

"Of course, my lady."

Miroir snapped her fingers, generating a series of mirrors around Linne. Seeing the countless reflections of herself startled her for a moment, but she quickly regained her composure and started smashing them with chi blasts.

"I'll smash them to bits!"

Mirrors were brittle things. In the face of Linne's tremendous projectiles, they fell to the floor in glimmering shards. But that was

fine. Linze had only intended to buy just enough time to get a spell off.

“[Heavenly Rain]!”

“Huh?”

Linne was confused by what she heard. The very next moment, rain began to pour down on the ring. The referee almost called out, assuming the spell to be hostile like **[Water Ball]**, but it seemed to just be rain, so he let it be.

The rain stopped just as quickly as it had arrived. All it had done was wet the two fighters.

“What?! Th-This is my favorite dress! My mom made it for me! You got it all soaked!”

Linne angrily charged forward...only to find herself slipping backward onto her own behind. She suddenly felt coldness where she fell, looking down to realize the entire arena was frozen over like a skating rink.

She looked up in confusion until she finally noticed the presence of a second spirit. This one looked a little more mature than the mirror spirit. She was a translucent jade spirit with a faint glow about her.

“I, too, have tricks up my sleeve, Linne. Aeri, would you?”

“Mhm, mhm! Aerial, coming through!” the spirit answered casually before unleashing her power on Linne.

Something unseen began pushing Linne around the ring, like an invisible balloon.

“Wh-What is this?! Grr!”

In her frustration, Linne lashed out with a right hook to punch the invisible object. However, that would prove to be her undoing. The invisible thing wasn’t destroyed by the hit. It absorbed the

force...and then bounced it back. The recoil force sent Linne skidding across the slippery floor.

“Oh no! [**G-Gravi—**]!” Linne tried using weight magic to increase her own mass and stop the skidding, but the sheer momentum was too great for her to even regain her footing.

In a matter of seconds, a thud rang out across the room. Linne found herself on her butt outside of the ring. Her enhanced weight caused her to sink into the floor a little, but she hadn’t managed to cast the spell in time to stop herself. She was out of bounds.

“Ah...”

“R-Ring out! Linlin wins!”

The referee’s voice rang out, coaxing cheers and applause from the audience. Linlin, AKA Linze, let out a small exhale as the referee walked over to her.

“Er, Ms. Linlin... Just to be sure, that wasn’t offensive magic, was it?”

“Oh, no. It was more like defensive magic, really. The spell’s meant to protect oneself with a wall of wind. It only pushes back with force equivalent to that which is aimed toward it.”

“I see... So Linne here was pushed out by the force of her own attack? Apologies, I just need to check if that’s within the rules...”

The referee conferred with a few of the tournament officials before confirming that her method of victory was legitimate. Once again, the announcer confirmed her win.

Linze looked down at her feet and began wandering over to Linne, who was in a complete daze. The shock of loss had clearly overwhelmed her. Linze couldn’t help but worry. She hadn’t intended to hurt Linne’s feelings.

“L-Linne...”

“Wind spirit...”

“Hm?” Linze raised a brow at her daughter’s perplexed mumbling.

“I remembered it... That spirit you used, lady... It’s the wind spirit...”

“Hoh... You know of me, child?”

The translucent, greenish spirit chuckled...and Linne nodded her head at her.

“The wind spirit, Aerial... You’re close to one of the pillar spirits, but...the one in this era is different, I think...? Ah, um... Forget I said that...”

Linze smiled at Linne, who was trying to scramble and cover up her slip of the tongue. The wind spirit was indeed Linze’s trump card, but she knew it might reveal her identity. Elna had told her that in the future the wind spirit was her go-to companion.

Linze’s magical aptitudes included Fire, Water, and Light. Wind wasn’t among those elements. The ability to commune with spirits was closely related to your ability to wield magic, yet Linze had insisted on contracting with a wind spirit.

Normally, a wind spirit like Aerial would never make a contract with a human, but Linze was the wife of Touya, the Celestial Spirit King, so from Aerial’s point of view, she wasn’t about to pass up on the opportunity of contracting with the bride of someone in such an esteemed position. She could’ve refused if she wanted, but she had elected to take a chance out of curiosity.

It seemed like Linne simply assumed the spirit was contracted with someone else in the past. She hadn’t figured out Linlin’s real identity quite yet.

The little girl sulked and pouted on the floor, sniffing to herself. Linze smiled gently and produced a star-shaped badge from her pocket. It was identical to the one she wore.

“Hey, Linne? Listen to me... You’re very strong, but there are many out there who might be stronger. Not just your family, even. So try to remember that, okay?”

“...Mhm... Sorry...” Linne sniffled quietly. She was probably reflecting on the bravado and bluster she’d had back in the waiting room. After all that big talk, she’d lost, which made her feel like an utter fool.

“...I don’t really know what to say, sweetheart, but listen...how about I just show you instead?”

“...Uh, what?”

Linze reached out and pinned the badge onto Linne’s chest. The badge allowed one to see through any **[Mirage]** effects cast on similar badges. In other words, Linne now saw Linze as she truly was.

The little girl’s eyes widened in shock.

“M-Mom...?”

“Ha ha ha... It’s still a little funny to hear you call me that... After all, I haven’t even given birth to you ye— Ah!”

Linne leaped forward and wrapped her arms tightly around Linze. She held onto her beloved mother with all her strength, sobbing quietly.

“M-Mom! It’s really you... A-Ah! Waaah! Mommy... I-It’s really you! W-Waaah! Waaaaaah!” the little girl cried loudly as she hugged Linze, refusing to let go. Linze blushed softly, but she quickly wrapped her arms around her daughter in turn. The palm of her hand gently pet up and down the girl’s back.

Linze knew that her daughter was quite similar to Elze in a lot of ways. She was a strong girl, but she needed to know it was okay to cry sometimes. Linze decided then and there that she’d let little Linne cry her heart out if need be. She’d be there to catch all of the girl’s tears, to ease all her anxieties.

“I-I’m so...happy... I-I missed you!”

“I know, sweetheart... It’s okay... I’m sorry I left you all alone...but I’m here now.”

The mother and daughter, who had met each other by transcending time itself, tenderly embraced for a good long while. The two of them kept each other warm and safe, hoping in their hearts they could feel this way forever.



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“Oh, it’s dad.”

Damn, talk about a casual response... You got all teary-eyed with Linze, but not me?!

As soon as Linne saw me, she toddled on over. She circled around me, Elze, Sakura, and Sue with a curious look on her face.

“Wh-What is it?”

“Hmm... My moms haven’t changed very much... Well, except for Sue! You all just look a bit younger. That’s a shame.”

“A shame...?”

“Well, that means we don’t show many signs of aging? That’s good, at least...”

We all kind of shrugged at each other as Linne heaved a small sigh. Just what the hell was she imagining?

“Linne! I’ve changed, right?! The future me’s a lot bigger, yeah?!”

“I mean... You’re a grownup, so...”

Sue tried desperately to wring whatever she could out of Linne. It was only obvious she’d mature as she got older, since she ended up having a kid.

“The future me’s gonna be a bombshell with all kinds of wow factor, right?!”

“Uh... Yep. Something like that.”

“See?! I knew it!”

Sounds more like she’s just telling you what you want to hear so you feel good about it...

I chuckled softly and ruffled Linne's hair. She was a good-natured girl, that much was for sure.

"I thought you'd all be more surprised to see me..."

"Well, we met Elna before you. You're actually the fourth of our kids to arrive. Quun and Frei are back at the castle. Oh, and Allis is here too."

"Oh, they're here already? And Allis too? I'm surprised Arcia isn't here yet, though."

Arcia... That's Lu's daughter, right? It's been hard keeping track of everyone popping up.

Linne's tummy suddenly started rumbling.

"Aww, mom...I'm hungry..."

"Huh? You haven't eaten yet? Oh, sorry! What would you like?"

"Um...I wanna eat the cabbage rolls you always make! Some big ones!"

When we went to Earth, Lu bought a bunch of cookbooks from around the world. Thanks to her efforts, the dishes from those books ended up becoming common in Brunhild. Linze sometimes helped her out in the kitchen, so she'd picked up a few things along the way as well.

"They'll take a little while to make, so we should save those for when we get home. You can have some of this in the meantime," I said that, then opened up **[Storage]**, pulled out a large rice ball, and passed it to Linne.

"Wow! Thanks, dad! Yum!" Linne exclaimed gleefully before chomping at her food. She looked like she was really enjoying it, so I couldn't help but smile.

Linze gently wiped away the rice grains from her daughter's cheek as she chowed down. The sight of it was remarkably heartwarming.

Though the sight was less one of a mother and a daughter...and more like sisters. Linne looked just like a mini-Linze, after all.

"Grand Duke...we need to get home... The others will be waiting."

"Oh, yeah, you're right."

Sakura's words reminded me that I had wives waiting back at the castle, so I opened up a **[Gate]** to Brunhild. I made a mental note to apologize to Chancellor Glatz and the beastking later on.

"All right, let's head home. Quun and Frei'll be happy to—"

"D-Dad...our phones fell into the Great Gau River... Can you get them for us?"

"Oh, uh... Yeah, I think so."

"Thanks, dad! Okay, mom, let's go!"

Linze and Linne merrily skipped through the portal. Elze let out a dry chuckle before shrugging and walking through the portal with Elna in tow. Sue and Sakura followed after them.

"Jeez... Leaving me behind, really? Well, whatever. I said I'd get their phones..." I mumbled as I opened a new **[Gate]** to the Great Gau River.

After a while I returned to the castle, having successfully located the phones. I found my two newest arrivals asleep in their mother's laps. They were snoring softly.

"Out like a light, huh?"

"Mhm. They must've been exhausted..."

"Yeah, no doubt. It was just them on their own for a couple days. They must've been worried sick."

I glanced at the table and noticed a stack of half-munched cabbage rolls. The two girls were sprawled out on a nearby sofa, getting gentle head pats from their mothers. It seemed like Elna and Linne had enough funds on hand to stay at an inn for the duration of their separation from us. Or rather, it'd be more accurate to say that Elna had enough funds. Linne came with nothing. Didn't really matter, though. I was just glad they'd stayed safe before we got to them.

"It's strange... I can't believe I'm cradling a child I haven't even given birth to yet... But I can tell...and not just because of her looks... She really is my daughter."

"Yeah... These girls... They're really precious, right, sis?"

The twins looked at one another, soft smiles on their faces.

"Don't want them catching a cold. Let's get them to a proper bed. **[Levitation].**"

I used my magic to delicately float Elna and Linne about a meter up into the air, then I ferried them to a nearby bedroom. One bed would be more than enough for kids as small as they were.

"Actually, Touya... Could you take them to the other room for us? I think it'd be better if Elze and I slept with them tonight..."

Huh? Well, sure, I guess.

That room has a pretty big bed, so you could fit four in no problem. Seemed a little snug, though; they'd have to bunch up like peas in a pod.

I placed Elna and Linne down on the big bed, then left Elze and Linze behind with them to get changed and go to sleep.

"See you in the morning."

"Mhm, goodnight."

"Night!"

The twins smiled happily at me as I left the bedroom and bade them goodnight. As I walked away, I suddenly realized how funny it was to have children so old... I hadn't even shared a bed with them or tucked them in yet.

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"Linne!"

"Allis!"

It looked like the two girls were going to hug each other, but they suddenly started brawling instead. They were both laughing, so I figured they were happy to see each other...but it was still a strange sight.

...Do you have to do that in front of the castle gates? The guys on guard duty are confused.

"T-Touya! How've you been raising your kid?! She's so violent!"

"...You're gonna say that to me when your own kid's doing the same thing?"

Ende seemed utterly baffled by the sight. Her three mothers simply looked on quietly.

"Seems they're having fun."

"Mmm... I'm not sure if Allis is as strong as the other child... She's certainly cuter, though."

"Absolutely."

Hey, hold on! My daughter's way cuter. What're you three saying?! Are you blind?!

Right as I was about to roll my sleeves up, Ende jumped in.

"H-Hey, they're really going at it. Shouldn't we stop them?!"

“They’ll be fine. I can heal any scrapes, anyway. Apparently, they spar like this all the time in the future. It’s how they train together, or something like that, right, Elna?” I asked as I turned toward my other daughter.

“Mhm. The two of them fight similarly, so they always scuffle like this. Uncle Ende always freaks out about it, though...”

“U-Uncle Ende...?”

I wasn’t sure if it was just shock at being called that, but Ende suddenly froze. Melle and the other two could barely hold back their laughter. It was kind of funny, since Allis didn’t refer to me as her uncle. She just used my royal title. That was fine by me, however.

I chuckled quietly until I felt Elna tugging at my sleeve.

“Dad... You should stop them now. Neither of them will give up, so it’ll just keep going forever.”

“Oh, makes sense. Ahem... Cover all, Ice. Frozen Construct: **[Ice Pillar]**.”

“Wah!”

“Ghah!”

Ice grew from the ground, blocking Allis and Linne from reaching each other. They tried punching through the barriers, but I simply caused more to sprout up faster than they could destroy them.

“Daaad, stop it!”

“That’s enough, you two. We don’t have a lot of time to play today, remember?”

“I guess...”

Glad you get it now... Let me just dispel that magic.

Elze and Linze suddenly arrived from the castle.

“Mom...” “Mommy!” Linne and Elna ran to embrace their respective mothers.

“Sorry to keep you guys waiting.”

“Mhm. Sorry we’re late.”

The twins held their daughters as they apologized to Melle and the others. They were all going out today as a group. Ende and I would be staying home, however. I could understand the benefit of mothers hanging out together, but I wondered if I’d gain anything from hanging out with my fellow dad.

“We’ll be back by tonight! See you later.”

“Later, Touya.”

“See you later, dad.”

“Byebye, daaad!”

“Come along, Allis.”

“Mhm! I wanna eat a yummy parfait!”

“Endymion, we’ll be expecting a hearty dinner when we return.”

“Katsu curry... No, Dragon curry!”

The saying went that three was a crowd, but five women and three kids was way more than that... I could barely tell where to look amidst the hubbub.

Ende and I weakly saw the girls off until we noticed them vanish into the distance. After that, we both heaved small sighs.

“Why does it feel like it’s harder being a dad?”

“Mmm... It’s a lot of pressure sometimes. But when you’ve got a daughter, it’s better to do whatever she wants, right?”

The two of us couldn't help but feel we'd been dealt a rough hand, but we accepted it nonetheless. Husbands were no match for their wives, after all.

"I should probably get home and start prepping that curry..."

"You're starting to act like a real family man, you know?"

It was kind of funny seeing Ende act like a kept man. I didn't know how he'd be after getting married, but he'd turned into a fully-fledged househusband.

"Hey, Touya...sell me some Dragon meat. I don't wanna go out and hunt some."

"Huh? I mean sure, but...why don't you have any? Haven't been out questing lately?"

He was a gold-ranked adventurer like me, so he should've had Dragon hunts every couple of days.

"Ha ha ha... Bold of you to assume my family couldn't eat a whole Dragon in a day. Whatever meat I get usually ends up devoured in under an hour."

"Oh, I see..."

Ende's wives were even bigger eaters than Yae... It was kind of insane, really. I couldn't even begin to imagine their food budget. I felt sorry for him, so I sold him some Dragon meat on the cheap.

Ende went off to the castle, so I decided to attend to my royal duties. Kousaka had given me a total lecture on abandoning the country for my visit to Mismede the other day... I was glad none of my kids were awake to see me getting told off, though. I'd have lost my pride as a father... If I even had much to begin with, that is.

Once the kids started arriving, I became a bit more self-conscious about how I conducted myself, since I was a royal and a father at the

same time, after all... No doubt the future me had trouble juggling those things too.

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Three days later...

“Isengard? Really?” I sighed quietly as I listened to Tsubaki’s report.

“Yes. The situation isn’t great. The loss of the witch-king destabilized much in the region, but that’s not the worst of it.”

The country of Isengard was sustained and ruled by a single man, the witch-king. His motives were impure, but it was clear that his actions largely benefited his country. When he fell, there was nobody in line to succeed him. He’d planned to live forever as a cyborg, so he likely hadn’t even considered anything like a line of succession.

Isengard ended up being cut off from the rest of the continent due to a meteor shower that happened when the worlds had merged. After the devastation, the survivors emerged to find themselves isolated. For better or for worse, Isengard was now split up into several major powers. It was similar to what had happened in Yulong, but in this case nobody wanted to follow in the footsteps of the old ruler.

Unlike Yulong, which had barbarically devolved into in-fighting and power struggles, the remnants of Isengard had begun slowly forming independent city-states and even making peaceful strides to work amongst themselves. However, when Yula made the giant golden tree appear in Isengard, the effects on the population were catastrophic. Those who didn’t die or escape were horribly mutated. I ended up putting a stop to the carnage, but the northern region of Isengard was completely and utterly devastated.

“There is one ray of hope, however. A new settlement is forming at the base of the Puretree you planted. It would seem that the air there offers safety from the goldflower pox.”

...Goldflower pox? Oh, right. That's what they started calling the thing where spores from Yula's mutations turn people into monsters through contact. Probably called that because golden flowers bloom out of the infected people's heads. It's not actually a disease, though...

The Puretree had the ability to purify anything produced by the wicked god, but since I'd defeated it, there wasn't anything to worry about. There was no more risk to be had when it came to this pox or whatever.

"There seems to be a medicine circulating in southern Isengard. It's purported to prevent one from contracting the goldflower pox. I believe it's made out of ground-up branches from the Puretree."

"Ground branches? That sounds like quackery to me. The spirits in the tree wouldn't let anyone mulch the tree for medicine."

Grifters had a habit of following insecure people and telling them exactly what they wanted to hear in order to profit off their anxieties. It was a scummy move. In this case, the scam was probably working fine because nobody could disprove the medicine's effectiveness. If no new mutations sprung up, the peddler could claim credit.

"Start spreading hearsay about how that medicine's fake, please. The spirits wouldn't let people harvest the tree in that way. Just let everyone know it's a scam. That should put an end to the sales."

"Got it."

Unlike Yulong and Sandora, there wasn't anyone in Isengard who had any major grudge against me. I was a little relieved not to have to worry about it.

Isengard had been under a dictatorship before I felled the witch-king, so the political fallout afterward had left everything in a state of disarray. National security was at an all-time low after the wicked

god incident, and there were more thieves and bandits than ever. That was probably why stuff like that medicinal fraud was going unchecked too.

After Tsubaki finished her report and left, there was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

I took my eyes off my paperwork and looked up to see Elna peeking through a crack in the door.

"Uhm, dad... Can we talk?"

"Sure can. What's up?" I replied and smiled as she walked into the office. Unlike her mother, Elna was very reserved. In that regard, she was more similar to Linze. Visually she very much looked like a miniature Elze, however.

"Umm... That weapon mother used at the tournament the other day... I-I was wondering if...maybe I could..."

"Weapon? Oh, you mean her wand?"

When Linze was posing as Linlin, I gave her a small wand with a star on the end. It looked like Elna wanted it.

"I'm not so good against monsters that can resist magic... It always makes me scared to fight, but...I thought if I could use that star the way Mother did...then maybe it'd help."

That made sense, but Elna seemed a little small to wield it properly.

Hm... I should just make her a wand of her own.

"I'll make you a new one, Elna. Want to help design it?"

"Oh! Th-Thank you, dad!" Elna's face spread out into a huge smile as she said that. She was adorable. My daughter was an absolute angel... I couldn't help but turn into a doting dad before her, or any

of her siblings for that matter. What was the alternative? Ignore their cute little faces? Impossible!

I pulled out the materials for a wand from **[Storage]**.

I'm gonna put my all into this!

The two of us sat in my office for a while, spending some quality daddy-daughter time together as I crafted her ideal weapon.

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"You little shit! Outta the way!" the brute roared as he brought his knife swinging toward the girl. She dodged his unskilled attack with ease, grabbing her assailant by the arm and slamming him to the ground.

"Hrkh!"

The girl shook her head as she looked down at him. She wore a deep red hakama, a purple patterned kimono, and high-laced boots. The blades hanging by her waist jostled as she moved. Her hair was long, flowing down to her waist. Her bangs were trimmed just above her eyebrows. She had black eyes and black hair... It was the kind of color you rarely saw in Isengard.

"Learn from this and cease your fraudulent activities... Taking advantage of insecurities to make money is a most heinous crime."

"Ghah!"

The man staggered to his feet and fled, but not before spewing a cliched line.

"I won't forget this, twerp!"

"I will forget you, though."

As she watched the man scampering away, she picked up a bottle he'd left behind. It was the fake medicine he'd been peddling.

“It should be obvious that the Puretree cannot be ground for medicine... I am sure that is so, but perhaps the Puretree is not as well known in this era?”

The girl opened up the bottle and took a look at the contents. She emptied a little out and raised a brow at what she saw.

“The golden drug...?”

The bottle contained a teaspoonful of powder that seemed to be gold dust. It emanated a strangely divine feeling. Had she not known any better, she might have even guessed it came from the Puretree. However, there was something in the faint glow of the powder that unsettled her. It was intuition more than anything, but that still counted for something. She felt that the medicine was insanely suspicious.

“I am certain my father could analyze this...”

She remembered that her father could use **[Analyze]** to reveal the composition of any substance. With that in mind, she took a small sample and placed it in her pocket.

“I should investigate this more thoroughly, I shoul— Ack... Er...I should investigate this!”

The girl gave chase after the man, taking care to suppress the speech quirk she’d inherited from her mother.



Chapter IV: Kids in the Park

“Hah!”

The crystal star let loose by Elna shot toward Linne. She braced her gauntlet hard and charged forward to intercept it.

“Hup! Take this!”

A clang rang out as gauntlet collided with star, but neither shattered. Instead, the star bounced back in a large arc before docking on Elna’s staff.

Linze couldn’t help but mutter in surprise as she watched the demonstration, saying, “...It’s sturdier than mine.”

“Elna’s wand is made of phrasium, so that’s only natural.”

The star was made of phrasium as well, of course. I poured a hell of a lot of magic into it, so it was extremely hard. Linne’s gauntlets seemed to be about as hard, actually... Seemed like future me was just as excited to make Linne’s weapons too.

“Hup!” Linne grunted as she kicked off the ground and swept her leg toward Elna. However, it was suddenly blocked by an invisible barrier.

Elze couldn’t help but giggle at that.

“The wand has **[Shield]** built into it.”

“And that’s not all either! Take a look at this!” Elna exclaimed as she twirled her wand, making the star on the end of it begin radiating a sparkling light. She kept on twirling...and a ring of light formed around Elna. It was almost like viewing the rings of Saturn.

“**[Boost]!**”

After invoking her mother's Null magic, Elna kicked off the ground and jumped about four meters into the air...and there she stayed. She remained completely stationary.

"She can fly?"

"Figured she can escape into the sky to deal with melee enemies...and her **[Shield]** can deflect any projectiles!"

"Isn't that a little much, Touya? I appreciate it, but it's kind of overkill..."

Elze had a point. I did get a little too carried away when making the weapon. But every time she cheered me on or called me cool, I felt compelled to add more features. It was hardly my fault!

We'd shown off all the stuff the wand could do, so the mock battle came to an end.

"Hey, Elna! That was awesome! I wanna fly too!"

"Hee hee hee... But you're strongest when you're on the ground, Linne."

"That's true..."

Elna grinned, but Linne sulked a little. There was another child who was itching to fight...but her mother was keeping her in check.

"Elna! Me next! Let's play next!"

"Hey, Frei! That's enough!"

Frei, who'd finally managed to shake off Hilde's restraint, charged toward her sister with reckless abandon. She was a weapon maniac, so this was to be expected. Any time a new or interesting weapon appeared, she had to see it. I couldn't help but feel a little upset about it, but her enthusiasm was rather cute.

"She's normally so well-behaved... Why's she like this when it comes to weaponry?"

“Mmm...”

I comforted Hilde a bit as she grumbled. Frei was a little wild, but it was just part of who she was. I couldn't help but feel bad for Elna, though... She didn't seem half as enthusiastic.

The battle between Frei and Elna began. Direct magic was forbidden to help test out the weapon, since that was the whole point, so the odds weren't exactly in Elna's favor. Frei decided not to use **[Storage]** magic for her weapons to even the playing field a little.

This was just an exercise to show off Elna's star wand, so winning or losing didn't really matter. Frei would be happy just to see the weapon in action, I felt.

“Hey, hey...dad...”

“What's up, Linne?” I asked as I raised a brow toward my daughter.

“I was talking to Allis the other day and...are you gonna make the amewsment park yet?”

“Huh?”

Amewsment park...? Wait, does she mean amusement park? Do I build something like that in the future? Like...for my kids? No way! I know I'm a doting dad...but did I really go that far?! Surely it must be for tourism...or to entertain my citizens. Yeah, that's gotta be the reason why I did it... Probably...

“Could you tell me a little more about what you mean?”

“Umm... There's a Ferris wheel, a big dipper coaster...a parade...and... Oh, I can just show you...”

Linne fiddled around in her pockets and pulled out her smartphone. It had **[Protection]** enchanting it, so its little jaunt into the Great Gau River left it no worse for wear. Both Linne and Elna had been able to use their phones with no issue.

“Look here.”

“Whah!”

The image Linne showed me was one of her and Linze... A slightly more mature Linze, might I add. They were standing in front of what seemed to be a fully-fledged theme park. Linne then flicked through the photos, showing me shots of her and Elna, one of Allis and an adult Elze, and a few more photos with her mother.

Just as I leaned forward to get a closer look at how well my wives had developed, the hand of god struck and snatched the phone away.

“That’s enough of that, you know?”

“Karen?!”

Before I could do anything, Linne’s phone was in Karen’s hand. The goddess of love shook her head at me and heaved a small sigh at my daughter.

“Linne, you know the rules about the future. Didn’t Tokie tell you? You’ll ruin all his fun if you give him spoilers, you know?”

“Ohhh, gosh...” Linne mumbled, looking pretty panicked when she got told off.

But I wanna see more! It’s not like the future will change, right? The time spirits will fix any discrepancies it caused, surely...

It was true that knowing what was coming could ruin my enjoyment a little, but I was still really interested.

“I’m sorry, Karen...”

“It’s okay, you know? You can talk about the amusement park! Just don’t show him these photos. There are things in here he should experience for the first time with his own two eyes, not through photos.”

Damn it... It's not like I don't get it...but how come she can talk about the park, but not this?

"The best site to build is southwest of the castle town."

"Huh? We gotta build it?"

"You have Babylon's workshop, you know?"

Ah, I guess... But still...a theme park in Brunhild? The construction should be easy enough with the workshop, but we'll need a lot of materials. I'll have to do [Enchant] a lot for safety as well... Do I have to do the whole thing? It's not like I have to do it soon, right?

"Hm... Hm?"

As I pondered the timing of things, I felt two small eyes staring up at me. My daughter, Linne, gazed at me with the same deep blue eyes her mother had. I could feel the weight of her expectations on me.

Damn it... I can't resist this kind of focused attack.

"W-Well...I guess I could talk to Kousaka about it..."

"Yay!"

Thus, thanks to Linne's pleading, a plan for building the official Brunhild Theme Park was set into motion.

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"Hm... That's not a bad idea. If we drive tourism, then we drive the local economy. But don't do it solely by yourself, my liege. You'd take possible job opportunities away from viable construction workers."

I got permission from Kousaka...with some restrictions.

Gah... But if I used the workshop, I could build the whole thing in less than three days. Well, we can build the bulk ride parts at least. I'm sure the foundations can be handled by Dvergr pilots and Earth magic wielders. That part of the process should take a few months, and then I can start installing the rides.

But I couldn't just build a roller-coaster on my own. That was why I turned to Doctor Babylon. I could handle the easier stuff like merry-go-rounds and Ferris wheels, though. Either way, that was why I was talking to Doc Babylon about the idea.

"We don't have to build one. I actually have one in the storehouse."

"Wait, you have a whole theme park?!"

The doc spoke so casually about it that I could scarcely believe what she was saying.

"You can use Space-time magic to store things like that in smaller spaces, yes. I've created multiple smaller dimensions like that before, remember?"

"Oh, you mean that time we got trapped in that die thing..."

One time, when we were organizing the storehouse, we got trapped in this weird die and were forced to play a game to get out... It was a real headache.

The inside of the die was crazy huge, like a whole pocket dimension got stored inside. The same principle was used for Babylon's hangar. It was all operated via the use of a magical artifact.

"So can we still use the one you have?"

"I believe so. Even though it's been thousands of years, the protective magic should still hold true. That said, magic was more popular than technology back in my heyday, so I can't be sure the current civilization will enjoy the same things we did."

That was a good point. The attractions in this ancient park could end up being uninteresting or even disturbing or foreign to people of the current era. I remembered reading about some ancient Mayan game similar to soccer, but they used executed peoples' heads as the ball.

I could only pray that the facility would be fun for the whole family...or that it'd at least resemble something like a theme park I knew.

Still, if it was a dud, we could just take the best parts from it and install it into Brunhild's. Easy peasy.

I quietly sighed before pressing on and asking, "Is it safe?"

"Of course. There might be a few scary, or thrilling, aspects. Certainly things not for the faint of heart. But that's about it."



That made sense. People unfamiliar with roller coasters would probably react pretty intensely to experiencing one for the very first time.

“An ancient theme park, though... I’m curious about what manner of magical machinery they must have employed...” Quun, who’d poked her head out of the research laboratory to snoop on me, raised her voice to make that remark. That girl was singularly obsessed with all things magitech, so it only stood to reason she’d be interested.

“Father. I’d like to go into the little world with you.”

“I don’t know about that... It could be dangerous. Plus, there’s also—” Midway through my rejection of her request, I stopped. The sad look on Quun’s cute little face sent my heart into knots.

Urgh... Wh-What do I do?! Is she doing this on purpose?!

“F-Father...? Can’t I?”

“Gh... I...guess... I guess...you can...if the Doc says...it’s safe...”

“Hurray! Thanks, father!” Quun exclaimed as she gave me a big hug. However, her eyes appeared vacant. I’d been defeated. I knew she was playing me like a damn fiddle, but there was nothing I could do.

“...He’s such a simpleton.”

“...He certainly has simple tendencies.”

“...Scanners are detecting critical simplicity.”

I growled quietly as I heard Doc Babylon, Elluka, and Fenrir roast me. It wasn’t my fault. I had no chance against that kind of dirty attack, so why wage a war you couldn’t win?

First Linne, then Quun... Which of my daughters would exploit me next?

“Let’s invite everyone, then. Allis and her family too,” Quun spoke up, then started making several calls on her phone.

...Wait, when did I agree to that?

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“Hey, Touya. You sure this isn’t dangerous?”

“It’s safe... Probably...” I mumbled as I looked away from Ende. To be honest, I had no idea.

We were all in Babylon’s garden, answering Quun’s summons. Allis and her family had been invited as well, which included Ende.

They know about Babylon, so it’s fine, but frankly, I’m a little concerned about what the three mothers might do more than Allis herself...

Doctor Babylon was in front of us, running her fingers along the dice-shaped artifact. It was beeping and booping, which meant it was clearly some kind of touchscreen interface.

The top part of it was glass, so you could see inside. It was a little too small to see properly, but the inside resembled a garden diorama. There was a sea area and a forest part as well. It was kind of laid out like an amusement park.

“All right, let’s set it to an eight-hour excursion. You’ll be automatically ejected when time’s up, so don’t worry. Even if you get lost in there, it’ll be fine!”

“Huh...? W-Wait a second. You can get lost in there?” Linze asked, suddenly starting to panic. Kids sometimes got lost in amusement parks, so she was probably worried about losing Linne for hours at a time.

“It’s a big place, so yeah, you can get lost. But Touya has [Search], so it shouldn’t be a big deal, right?”

“Am I gonna be able to use my magic in there?”

“Some of the attractions are less fun with magic, so there are areas where you’ll have your spells sealed, but the main park itself should be fine.”

That sounds a little sus, but I guess if it’s safe...

“Dad, c’mon! Let’s gooo!” Linne roared and looked up at me with sparkling joy in her eyes. I still couldn’t shake some of the anxiety, however. I wasn’t sure if this amusement park was the same as that other time I got transported into one of Babylon’s inventions. The last time it happened, it was kind of a pain in the ass...

“I’m not going in there with you, by the way. I’ve got other things to tinker with today. Cesca’ll be the one to show you around, understand?”

“Indeed. I’ll be your guide today. I have all information on the attractions committed to memory,” Cesca puffed her chest as she said that, perhaps in an attempt to reassure us, but the knowledge that she’d be our guide only served to heighten my concern.

“All right, time to toss you in.”

The top of the box creaked open...and it began sucking us all up without any warning.

“Have fun in there, kids!”

I felt my consciousness fade to black as Doc Babylon’s voice rang in my ears.

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“Dad... Dad...”

“Hm?”

I woke up to the sensation of Elna tapping me on the shoulder. Then, I looked around and found myself on a large green lawn. Next to us,

in the middle of the greenery, was a large black monolith. It resembled the one from Babylon. It was surrounded by white metallic pillars that circled it. The sight kind of reminded me of England's Stonehenge. Each pillar had another metal beam on the top, creating what resembled a gate of sorts. However, naught but an endless meadow stretched out beyond the trilithons in front of me.

Everyone got up and looked at the structure with confused looks on their faces.

"...What is this? Is this an amusement park?"

"...This is the entrance to Babylon Park...in a manner of speaking. Please wait a moment," Cesca explained as she began operating the monolith, just as she had with the one in the garden.

Before long, a map of the area was projected into the air. There was stuff written on it, but I couldn't understand. Ancient Parthenon tongue, no doubt.

"Babylon Park is home to various themed zones and entertainment facilities. For example, the darkness zone is home to countless simulated traumas, guaranteed to strike fear into the hearts of any of our attendees."

"E-Eek..."

"M-Mommy?" Elna muttered as she glanced over at Elze, who'd let her own fear slip. A haunted house attraction was the last thing Elze would be interested in.

Elze quickly tried to play it off in front of Elna, though. She merely shook her head and gave a wink as if to say "No problem!"

Nobody else ribbed her over it either. Probably out of consideration for her motherly pride.

“I’m not sure where to begin... How about something we can all enjoy?”

“I agree. We shouldn’t do anything too extreme to start things out.”

Leen and Yumina seemed to be in agreement. My wives all had vague ideas of what amusement parks were. They’d seen them in movies with me before, but never actually gone to one in real life.

“Personally, I’d like to try the ride involving the horses that go round and round.”

“That’s called a merry-go-round, mother. I like them a lot.”

Hilde, who was holding hands with Frei, made her opinion known. Apparently, Frei had ridden a merry-go-round that I’d made in the future. It was only natural for her to be interested in horses, considering her knightly upbringing. However, that was something you found in an amusement park on Earth. Would an ancient civilization’s park have that?

“Horses? I’m afraid we don’t have that. Though we do have facilities where you can ride manaforms.”

“Mana...forms? What, like animals made out of magic or something?”

“Something to that effect, yes.”

Manaforms, huh? It’s not like an animatronic, is it? Like a Golem horse or something?

“Magic animals? I wanna ride them!”

“My daughter has spoken. Make it so.”

Allis got all fired up, prompting Ney to stare at me with icy eyes.

Ugh... You’re just as dangerously doting as Ende.

“It’s in the Nature Zone. We’ll go there at once. Allow me to connect the appropriate portal.”

A point on the map suddenly started to glow and flicker. At the same time, one of the trilithons began to glow, generating a portal between its sides. It seemed like these things worked similar to my **[Gate]** spell.

Cesca led the way through the portal...and we found ourselves in another field surrounded by a fence. It resembled more of a farm than an amusement park, frankly.

“Ahhh... Dad, look!”

“Huh?”

Linne pointed at several objects that were bouncing around nearby. They were around the size of a balance ball. There was a red one, a green one, a yellow one, an orange one... All kinds of colors, really, and each one had something that looked like a saddle on top of them.

Wait, are these...?

“Welcome to the slime ranch.”

Upon hearing that, my wives began looking around with expressions of utter disgust on their faces. Cesca simply grinned in response.

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“It’s squishy!”

“It’s nice and soft...”

“It’s so cute!”

“Yeah, it’s really cute!”

“...I’m starting to question how these kids were raised.”

Allis and my daughters were all crowded around a Slime. It was an Orange Slime that was about the size of a balance ball. It bounced on the spot, squishing each time it hit the ground.

It looked like your typical cute Slime enemy you'd find in a video game. Compared to the Slimes I'd encountered, this one definitely seemed different... At the very least, it didn't seem as threatening.

"...Are these things safe to touch?"

"Don't go near the green ones!"

"Th-They're not gonna dissolve our clothes, right?"

"...I say we should kill them and be done with it, I do."

Yumina, Elze, Linze, and Yae stared at the Slimes with narrowed eyes. I could understand why they felt so strongly about the matter. After all, the four of them (and myself) had a bad experience with Slimes in the past.

Apparently, Partheno had made several leaps and bounds when it came to Slime research, so they'd produced several docile strains... Presumably the ones in front of us were some of those.

"They look friendly to me."

"Their individual traits might have been stripped away? This one here's a Red Slime, but it's cool to the touch."

Sue and Leen were already petting a Red Slime. Red Slimes were, by nature, burning hot. The fact that this one was cool meant it must have had any dangerous characteristics bred out.

Oh... I guess they're all the same type of Slime, but just different colors, then?

"Hup!" Allis yelled and jumped upward, straddling the saddle of a Pink Slime. There was a handle jutting out from the front of the saddle, which looked kind of like one you'd see on a bike, so she grabbed on with both hands.

The Slime began to bounce around the area with the little girl atop it... Watching the newly-christened Slime rider brought a small grin to my face.

“This is awesome! Go faster!” Allis exclaimed as she leaned her body weight forward, prompting the Slime to bounce faster. As it accelerated, it started to bounce less and less... By the time it reached max speed, it was sliding across the ground like a slug. It was honestly impressive though, since it was going at about the same pace as a reasonably fast bicycle.

“I wanna go!” Linne followed Allis’s lead by clambering onto a Slime next to her and started riding it. The other kids followed suit.

“It looks like fun. I want to try...”

“Yeah, me too!”

Sakura and Sue got on their own Slimes and started hunting down the kids.

“Lady Melle, we should join them!”

“I’m quite fine, thank you. But the two of you can ride if you like, Ney.”

With that, Ney and Lycee got on horseback...or rather, Slimeback, and set themselves away.

Should... Should I try it?

I slowly approached a nearby Black Slime and placed my hand atop its saddle. It didn’t react. I shrugged and swung my leg over, sitting atop its back.

“Whoa! Gah! Agh!”

The moment I got on, the Black Slime started to wiggle and writhe like crazy. It was like I was on some kind of bucking bronco.

S-Stop! Stop!

“Hey! Gah!”

The Black Slime bucked me off, and I was sent catapulting into a nearby grassy patch. It was a real rough landing...

“Are you okay, Touya?”

“Yeah, I’m fine... Didn’t hurt that much.”

Lu came running over out of concern. I’d been thrown quite violently, but luckily, I hadn’t really been hurt. If I had to guess, the field we were in probably had some kind of injury dampening effect around it. I would’ve preferred complete damage nullification, but I figured some pain was necessary to help you learn your lesson... Still, we were in an area of the park where I couldn’t use my magic to strengthen my body...and my balance wasn’t really the best to begin with...

“Pfft... Little tied up there, Touya? Who’d have thought a Slime would be the thing to bring you down.”

“It’s harder than it looks, jackass. Why don’t you give it a try?”

I was a little annoyed by Ende’s cockiness, so I pointed over at the Black Slime. It clearly had an attitude problem. I’d heard of crazy horses, but never a crazy Slime...

Ende shrugged and started walking over toward the Slime. Then, without a second thought, he hopped onto its saddle.

“You really had a problem with this thi— Ack... H-Hey, easy there... Agh! N-No, wait!”

Ende’s smug grin was wiped clean off his face as the Black Slime began violently thrashing about. It bucked and writhed, desperately trying to knock him off. All the while, Ende was clinging on for dear life.

Get him! Get that smug bastard! He can’t hold on forever!

“Ugh... W-Wait! Agh!”

The Black Slime suddenly stopped thrashing, sending Ende flying forward. After he spun through the air and landed hard on his back, I could practically see the stars circling his head. And, to top it all off, the Black Slime slid up next to him and smacked his chest.

Oof!

“Pfft... Little tied up there, Ende? Thought it’d have taken more than a Slime to get the better of you.”

“...I still rode it for longer than you, didn’t I?” Ende groaned as he glared up at me.

...Is that a challenge?

“Huh? You guys can’t ride?”

“That’s kinda lame, dad...”

“Huh?!”

Ende and I broke our deadlock to turn to the left. Linne was standing there, looking confused, and Allis seemed decidedly unimpressed by our posturing.

“W-Wait, Linne! I can ride it!”

“H-Hold on, Allis! I’m not lame!”

“Linne, Allis. Don’t be so quick to judge. I’m sure Uncle Ende and Father were just demonstrating the potential risks of riding. Isn’t that right, father?”

Before we could come up with a suitable cover story for our crippling failures, Quun rode over on a Slime of her own and offered a convenient excuse. She had a smug grin on her face that made me think of Leen... The little twerp knew exactly what was going on here, clearly!

“Is that right, dad?”

“Uhhh... Yeah, of course! I wanted to make sure this place had proper safety measures in place, while also teaching you guys the best way to land. Right, Ende?”

“Huh? Oh... Uh, yeah! Yep! We needed to fall as hard as we could too. Got to test the shock absorption! Ha ha!”

Ende started to emphatically nod his head. Maybe a little too much. Even though I knew I was dancing in Quun’s palm, I couldn’t allow myself to lose face here. No doubt Ende felt the same.

“Ohhh, that makes lots of sense. I knew you guys wouldn’t be that pathetic!”

...Just smile and wave, Touya. Smile and wave.

I extended a thumbs-up toward Allis, refusing to let her know how much her words had just wounded my pride. Ende was clearly more affected than I was, however... His shoulders were slack, and I could feel the gloom emanating from him. Any man would feel that way after hearing his own daughter mock him.

We watched the kids ride off before relaxing our stances slightly.

“...Yep, this area’s secure. Now we know the kids can play safely.”

“Yep, sounds good to me. Let’s keep them away from the black one, though. It’s not exactly friendly.”

“The two of you are useless fathers.”

Quiet, you...

I grumbled a bit at Cesca’s needless commentary, silently hoping she’d give the Black Slime a test ride to see how she’d cope.

“So is this place just for riding Slimes?”

“More or less, yes. The soil here has curative and relaxing qualities imbued into it. It’s an area suitable for picnics and calm experiences.”

Linze’s question was promptly answered by Cesca.

...If this is a picnic place, then we should've come here closer to noon. Would've been better to eat lunch here.

The kids were happy, though, which made me happy. Plus, Sue, Sakura, Ney, and Lycee also seemed to be having a good time.

"Mooom!" Linne exclaimed as she merrily bounced toward her mother. In response, Linze offered the little girl a comforting wave, but the presence of the approaching Slime was clearly making her uncomfortable.

"Mom, come ride with me!"

"Er..."

Welp, she's tensed up.

"I wanna ride with you! Pretty please?!"

"Er... W-Well, Linne... I-It's just... Oh, that Slime isn't big enough for two! So...I can't!"

Right after Linze had managed to worm her way out of it, Cesca butted in.

"Fret not. If you combine two Slimes of the same color, you can create a larger Slime capable of seating two."

Cesca smiled widely as Linze glared sharpened daggers right into her. I could see tears forming in the corners of her eyes... I could understand how the poor thing felt, though.

Quun rode her Slime over to one that was the same color, then bumped her mount into it. After a few moments of touching, the other Slime was absorbed into Quun's... Partially, anyway. It was more like part of it had connected, creating a kind of conjoined Slime that resembled a dango skewer. It kind of reminded me of this old puzzle game where you had to match up bubbles in a row to make them disappear.

“Oh my, it works. Now it’s a two-seater. Care to ride with me, mother?”

“I suppose I can do that, yes. I’ll leave the piloting to you, however.”

Leen shrugged her shoulders as she walked over to the Slime her daughter was riding.

“You come up here too, mother!”

“H-Hm? Me? Er, well... I suppose so...”

Frei yelled down at Hilde, who stood up and straddled a Slime alongside her daughter. After seeing Leen and Hilde join their respective daughters, Linne and Elna looked expectantly at Linze and Elze. They had big, pleading eyes... The two of them even began making little whining sounds in unison. Their mothers were completely powerless before the cuteness, prompting them both to speak up at once.

“W-Well...I suppose we could give it a try...”

They’d been utterly defeated. It made me a little happy to know I wasn’t the only pushover when it came to the kids.

Elze and Linze straddled the Slimes behind their daughters, awkward smiles on their faces. Each time the Slimes beneath them squirmed, so too did the twins. Their nervousness was palpable.

“E-Eep... It’s all squishy!”

“Th-This thing won’t start dissolving anything, right?”

After confirming their mothers were safely aboard, Elna and Linne started moving their respective Slimes forward. Elna moved slowly and cautiously, but Linne blasted forward at full speed.

I locked eyes with Linze and sensed her silent screaming as she zoomed on by, but it was too late to save her... I just had to pray she’d be okay.

“...I cannot help but be thankful my daughter is not present, I cannot.”

“...I feel a little bad about being so relieved, but I agree...”

Yae and Yumina had muddled expressions on their faces as they saw the other girls go off with their daughters on the Slimes. Even if the parents weren't doing so great, the kids were happy. That was all that mattered...I think.

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“That was fun!” Frei roared, positively shimmering with excitement all the while. I was glad she'd had fun, at least.

All the other kids were brimming with energy as well. Even after dismounting the Slimes, they were bouncing on their heels and ready for the next ride. In fact, they were so excited that they'd started chasing each other in a big circle, like some kind of demented merry-go-round.

I glanced over at Linze and Elze, who looked completely haggard... Linze especially. She was smiling with her mouth, but not with her eyes.

“L-Let's go...somewhere...relaxing...next...” Linze muttered quietly as she shook her head. Out of all the girls riding the Slimes, she'd had it the worst... Linze charged their mount so fast it must have been like riding a rollercoaster.

From the looks of things, poor Linze had a case of motion sickness... Unfortunately, that wasn't something I could fix. It was a natural condition, so I couldn't use **[Recovery]** to cure it...

“Hm... A relaxing place, you say...? Let's see... Can't you relax here?”

“And what's so relaxing about this place, huh?!”

“Oof!”

Cesca's casual remark made Linze storm forward and shake her by the shoulders. Her eyes were bloodshot.

"Y-You must calm down, Linze-dono. We shall choose a new destination, we shall. I would prefer a place where we can move our own bodies rather than a vehicle, I would," Yae said as she pried Linze's hands off Cesca. Frei, Linne, and Allis all raised their hands in support.

"A place to exercise your body...? Then we shall go to the dark zone."

"W-W-Wait a minute! Dark zone?! That sounds way too creepy!" Elze complained and flailed her arms in a panic in response to Cesca's words. Elna looked up at her mother in confusion, clearly confused about why she was so worried. Future Elze had evidently done a good job of hiding her fears.

"Nay, be not afraid. The dark zone is a hunting area in which you can recreationally fight simulated enemies and monsters."

"Oh... Like a simulation?"

"Precisely."

The last time we got caught up in this dice hell, we had to fight simulated enemies... It seemed like the dark zone attraction featured similar opportunities.

"...It's not dangerous, right?"

"Correct."

"Hm... Then I guess we could," Elze tentatively agreed and nodded her head.

The main purpose of this theme park trip was to entertain our kids, but the secondary purpose was to get some inspiration for things we could use in Brunhild's theme park. If we avoided some attractions because of our personal fears, we might miss out on some good

experiences. Elze clearly knew that, hence her reluctant acceptance of going to a potentially scary place.

It was also obvious that she didn't want to ruin her daughter's day out. Elna seemed excited to go. She ran up to Elze and held her hand, giving it a tight squeeze. I couldn't help but be a little jealous... I was her father, after all.

Out of nowhere, Quun sauntered over to my side with a malicious grin on her face.

"Shall I hold your hand...father?"

"Ghhh... How'd you know what I was thinking?!"

"You're my father, you know? I know everything there is to know about you."

...I'm not so sure about that...

Despite my doubts, I quietly sighed and let Quun take my hand. It was a little embarrassing being spoken down to by my own kid, but part of me actually felt a little happy.

"Let's head on, folks. The next area's this way."

Cesca activated the Slime ranch's trilithon portal, and we headed on through. The light within the portal was so blinding that I was briefly robbed of sight, and then...

My eyes failed to adjust. It was just darkness. Darkness all around... I glanced to my left and right, seeing only black. Then I looked up and saw a blood-red moon, shining full and resplendent. I had no idea when it had become night... Or maybe this place was simply designed to be perpetually dark.

The dull illumination of the moon above revealed a sprawling cemetery ahead of us.

"Wh-What is this?!"

The sudden shift caused Elze to shudder and panic. Elna stood by her mother's side, clenching her hand just a little tighter. She looked nervous too, but not as nervous as Elze.

...Why's there spooky background music playing too?! Isn't this overkill?

Just as I turned to Cesca for an explanation, a hand burst out from beneath the soil in front of us.

"Eek!"

"Eep!"

Several skeletal hands, some with scraps of flesh still attached, rose from the graves before our very eyes. The sight elicited several frightened shrieks.

After a short time, our would-be attackers emerged from their resting places. It was a group of Skeletons. I quickly mustered my magic and tried to cast **[Banish]**, but it fizzled out and didn't do anything at all.

Crap... My magic doesn't work here?!

Yae pulled out the sword at her waist and swiftly cleaved at a Skeleton by her side...only for her attack to fail completely. It simply passed through the spectral foe.

"These are illusionary enemies. You can't beat them normally. Your attraction weapons are right here, so take your pick," Cesca motioned to a nearby countertop as she said that, pointing out a row of neatly lined-up weapons that were on it.

Huh? That's pretty convenient, isn't it? Oh, wait...I guess this is a ride, huh?

Quun and Leen casually walked up to a Skeleton and began inspecting it.

“My, it’s certainly authentic. You can barely tell it apart from the genuine article.”

“Interesting that it’s not attacking us... Is that because we’re unarmed?”

“No touching the attraction monsters, please.”

Cesca said that, but it wasn’t like they could... These things were basically holograms... Frighteningly realistic ones, however. The way one of the Skeletons chattered its teeth was especially freaky.

“All right, I’m gonna use this greatsword!” Frei exclaimed as she casually swiped up a sword that was as long as her own body. Whether it was thanks to the material or some kind of weight-reducing enchantment, the little girl swung it with ease, cutting through a nearby Skeleton.

There was a generic slashing sound effect and the Skeleton disappeared in a puff of smoke, leaving behind a floating number ‘10’ where it died. I cocked a brow in confusion upon seeing that.

“That kill was worth ten points. You have thirty minutes to earn as many points as you can. You’ll get prizes based on your score at the end.”

“There are prizes?”

I was a little surprised to hear that. Prizes for games were usually the kind of thing you’d find at a carnival, not an amusement park... Perhaps this place was more like a hybrid?

“You should play with us too, mother!”

“Ha ha ha... That does sound rather fun. I shall join you.”

Hilde seemed rather eager to accept her daughter’s invitation. She picked up a longsword and slashed at a nearby Skeleton. It vanished into a puff of smoke, leaving behind a ‘10’ again... But then after that

number vanished, a '5' flashed up as well. This was kind of reminding me of a video game.

"You can earn extra points per kill if you successfully hit your enemy's weak point. The location tends to vary, so try your best to maximize your gains."

"Hmhm... Then we should strike while the iron is hot, we should. I will indulge in this, I will."

Yae picked up a sword from the counter and charged into the fray. With that as their starting cue, everyone picked up a weapon and started killing Skeletons. Even Elze, who was spooked at first, picked up some gauntlets and joined in on the fun. It seemed she was usually fine with facing her fears so long as she could punch them... I was just glad they had a weapon she was familiar with, or she wouldn't be able to do much punching at all.

The kids seemed completely unfazed by the spooky, scary Skeletons. They were blasting, slashing, and punching as much as they could. They clearly weren't gold or silver adventurers for nothing.

Linze, Leen, and I weren't too interested in participating, so we stayed behind and watched everyone else have their fun. We did take a couple of weapons with us just in case, however.

I had a spear with me, since I figured if I was gonna use a weapon, I might as well use one I didn't really use often.

"Hup!" I exclaimed as I thrust my spear out into a nearby Skeleton's breastbone. Even though the Skeleton was just a projection, I actually felt the tactile feedback from the impact. It was a great simulation.

A '10' flashed up in the air, then a '5' did. I'd gotten the bonus.

Woo, go me.

"It's kinda boring just killing Skeletons, isn't it?"

Almost as if the area was responding to me, rotting Zombies began rising from the ground to mix things up. Then came the wolf Zombies, then the bandage-clad Mummies...

More, and more, and more, and more... The enemies swarmed us in droves. It kind of felt gratuitous, really.

This is a little excessive, isn't it?! Man, what a pain... I just wanted to hang back and chill out.

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Yumina's arrow flew true through the air. It whistled as it shot forward and pierced a distant Zombie in the forehead. Just like you'd see in a game, the number '20' appeared after it puffed away into smoke.

Huh, so the Zombies are worth more.

Zombies and Skeletons basically went down in one shot, so they weren't that big of a deal.

"There are way too many of them..."

The enemies kept coming in droves. No matter how many we put down, more just rose up to replace them. It was like being force-fed at an elderly relative's house when you just wanted to be done.

"Ugh... I wish I could use my magic..."

"I agree."

Linze and Leen couldn't help but sigh. I could understand why they were troubled, since this attraction blocked off their primary mode of attack. The others were still merrily fending off the incoming hordes, however.

"Aw! Mother, that was my kill!"

"The early bird gets the worm, Frei. If it vexes you, then train harder."

Hilde and Frei exchanged banter as they pulverized scores of undead. And they weren't the only ones either.

"Awright! I'm at five hundred points, dad! What about you?!"

"Think I'm at six hundred or so."

"Huh?! No way, I won't lose!"

Allis and Ende had turned it into a contest between themselves. It looked like fun, honestly.

"Ah! Mama Yae! That way!"

"I see it, I do!"

Linne called out, prompting Yae to slash her sword outward. Her strike cleaved two Zombies in half in an instant.

Mama Yae, huh...?

Linne wasn't related to Yae by blood, but both Linze and Yae were my wives. It was only natural that all my children would view everyone as their mother. I spied a hint of redness on Yae's cheeks, as well as a little grin. She was probably happy to hear it. It surely made me hope Yakumo would show up sooner.

"Oh, Touya! Look!"

"Whoa..."

Linze pointed over to something big amidst the Zombie horde. The background music suddenly shifted into a more imposing orchestral score...and the ground shifted. A massive undead Dragon burst out of the ground.

A Dragon Zombie? Is that the boss monster or something?

"This one's mine!" Allis exclaimed as she leaped forward, striking the Dragon with her gauntlet-clad fist.

The part that Allis struck warped and changed color slightly, but the Dragon didn't vanish like the others.

"That's the final enemy. It'll take more than one hit."

Hrm... Guess it makes sense that we'd have to hit it a ton of times. It'd be boring if you could take out the last boss that easily.

"GRAAARGH!"

"Watch out, guys!"

The Dragon Zombie suddenly spewed out a poison goop. It looked poisonous... It probably wouldn't actually poison us, but I figured it'd be best to avoid it...

"That stinks!"

I reflexively pinched my nose as a stench rose up from the impact site.

What the hell is that smell?!

It wasn't unbearably bad, but it reeked worse than rotten eggs. I'd smelled worse before. There was that one Slime, for example... Still, it was certainly gross enough to make everyone else gag.

"Don't fret. It's unpleasant, but it won't have any lasting effects. It'll go away when you beat the Dragon."

Ugh... Can't it go away now?! It reeks! We need to get rid of this thing...

I glanced over at Melle, Ney, and Lycee. They seemed completely unfazed for some reason.

"How come you guys are fine?"

"Oh, we can sever any of our senses at will... Though it seems like Allis isn't so good at it."

Melle gestured toward her daughter. The poor little thing had her hands cupped over her nose and mouth. My guess was that Allis probably couldn't do it at all, since she wasn't a pure Phrasian life-form. Ende was doing the exact same thing with his hands, so she probably had him to thank for that.

"Fear not, Allis. I can handle this."

"Mhm. Ney's right. Leave this to your mothers."

Ney stepped forward, hefting a huge ax. Lycee stood by her side, brandishing twin blades.

Hold up!

I quickly dashed forward and whispered to the two of them, saying, "...We don't wanna take away the fun, do we? Shouldn't we focus more on support and let the kids do the bulk of it?"

"Hrm... You mean for us to leave everything to Allis and the youngsters?" Ney asked as she glared at me.

...I didn't mean for you to sit by the sidelines, it's just... Ugh!

As I struggled to find the words, Ende spoke up.

"What Touya meant to say was, he thinks we should fight alongside the kids. Right?"

Yeah... That's better... It'd be lame for the kids if their parents just did all the work.

"I see... Come then, Allis! Let's slay this foe together!"

"Okay!"

Ney and Lycee charged toward the Zombie with Allis in tow. Frei, Quun, Elna, and Linne cheered and charged forward with their own weapons as well. Not wanting to be outdone, Elze, Hilde, Yae, and Ende followed after them.

The rest of us took out the remaining Skeletons and Zombies to prevent us from being overwhelmed.

I swung my spear around here and there, mopping up the mobs with little effort. The only question burning in my mind was...how many points would the Zombie Dragon be worth?

“GRAAAUUUGH!”

After being sufficiently whaled on, the Zombie Dragon burst into particles of light. Point scores like ‘520’ and ‘750’ exploded from the dead boss, flashing in front of whoever earned them. That was probably the Zombie Dragon’s total value being distributed among the people who did the most damage to it.

“We did it!” Frei cheered as she raised her sword high into the air. The other kids looked excited too as they merrily yelled alongside one another. Their parents looked on with gentle smiles on their faces.

The stink finally dissipated...and a victory fanfare played.

...Is it over?

Right as I wondered that, the surrounding area lit up, and we found ourselves in an open, pure-white space. There was another monolith nearby.

“Congratulations, all of you. It’s time to see what prizes you’ve earned according to your scores. Here’s the list.”

Cesca slid her finger along the monolith, projecting a list of prizes into the air. The kids all looked up at it excitedly.

“...I can’t read it.”

“Yes, it appears to be written in the tongue of Partheno... That language died some five thousand years ago,” Leen casually replied to Frei’s disappointed mutter. Doctor Babylon had told me that in

the distant past, Partheno had dominated almost a full third of the continent. There was no doubt that their language was widespread.

“Oh, my apologies. It’s improperly converted, just give me a moment.”

The list began rearranging itself after Cesca swiped her finger again. She placed her palm flat on it, creating a magic circle along the monolith. Cesca must have had a translation tool installed into her at some point...because this feature of hers was news to me... I wasn’t complaining, though. It was useful.

Unfortunately, now that I could read the list, I wished that I couldn’t. These prizes were obviously picked out by Doc Babylon. I should’ve known from the beginning that they’d be no good.

“...Mom, what’s a...horny potion?”

“What?! E-Erm... Er...Linne, that’s um... That’s just medicine that helps people get along...”

“...What’s a lusty lingerie?”

“What?! E-Erm... Er... Elna, I’ll tell you when you’re older!”



Not everything on the list was bad, but nearly everything was pretty awful. I made a mental note to tell the doc off about this.

Elna, Linne, and Allis weren't really sure what to look at. Quun, on the other hand, had a sly grin on her face. She clearly knew precisely what was listed here. If you asked me, she was a little too well-educated for a girl at the age of ten...but she was a seeker of knowledge.

"...I-I'll take the bathing salts set."

Frei had a huge blush on her face, and I found myself surprised. But she was the oldest of the kids, so it was probably to be expected. She was a year older than Yumina was when I met her, after all.

"Hey... That bath set's fine, right?"

"It's a simple set for treating stiffness, arthritis, and neurological symptoms. There's nothing suspicious about it," Cesca replied and shrugged nonchalantly in response to my question. I was glad there was nothing ostensibly shady about that, at least.

I managed to distract the kids from the list and prevented them from getting any weird items. But, interestingly enough, Ney and Lycee were avidly perusing the items available.

Melle was an unusual Dominant Construct who had traveled through various worlds and evolved into something beyond a Phrase. She also read all kinds of things in Babylon's library during her imprisonment, so she had considerable knowledge about many subjects. Sex was one of them, so she wasn't all that curious about the listed items. Come to think of it, her knowledge of sex was probably what resulted in Allis being born. However, Ney and Lycee were pure Dominant Constructs, so they weren't exposed to more biological methods of procreation. Thus, they looked at the list with childlike curiosity and lack of knowledge.

“Hey, Endymion. This S&M Wooden Horse... Is it a dish served with horse? The S must stand for salt, yes? But what of the M?”

“Uh... It’s not really something you eat...”

“...This killer swimsuit... What’s so lethal about it?”

“Uh... That’s, uhhh... Hey, Touya! Little help here?”

What do you want me to do, man? Sounds like a you problem.

Just as all hope seemed lost, a helping hand came in to save Ende.

“Ney, Lycee. Why don’t we purchase this accessory set? I think it might be nice for Allis.”

“Ooh! Accessories? You’re right! That kind of thing would be perfect, Lady Melle!”

“Allis is so pretty that she’d look good in just about anything from this set.”

Ney and Lycee smiled as Melle led them away from the more dangerous items... She was certainly good at taking command. The others ended up making safe choices, but honestly, I was kind of interested in some of the naughtier stuff... I neglected to pick any, though... I was in far too chaste company for that.

Guess I’ll go with the animal ears set... Wait, what’s everyone looking at me funny for?

“That’s cute...” Elna mumbled as she looked at one of the items that materialized in my hands.

“Huh? Wanna try them on?”

“Yeah!” Elna exclaimed as she came running over to me with a huge smile on her face.

Heh, that’s my girl. She’s so cute! All right, let’s give her these doggy ears.

When I put the dog ears on Elna's head, they changed color to match her hair. The ears even started twitching a bit, like they were real.

Wait...she's got a tail too? Oh! I guess it's a hologram.

The tail started wagging, apparently influenced by Elna's happy mood.

...Huh. Guess my daughter's a beastman now!

"O-Oh... Y-You bought it to give to a child, of course you did. I see, I do. That makes sense, it does."

...I mean, yeah. Who else was I gonna buy it for? Although, I guess it'd look cute on you too, Yae... And the others, actually. Wait, did they stare at me earlier because they thought I'd bought it for them?

"Wow, sis! You look cute! Dad, me too! Pleaaase!"

"Mhm, hold still."

I gave Linne a set of wolf ears so she could be a matching canine with Elna. And just like it had with Elna, Linne's tail manifested about her lower body and started swishing around.

"Awawaaah! Y-You're so cute! Like...double cute! You were cute before, but now... Aaagh!"

The sight of Linne in animal ears sent Linze into a tizzy. It always made me laugh whenever Linze praised Linne's cuteness, since they both looked pretty similar to me. It was like self-praise. They were both insanely attractive if you asked me!

"Oh, that is cute. Father, can I have a set as well?"

"And me, please."

"Grand Duke, gimme some too!"

Quun, Frei, and Allis all came running over. Ende glared at me a little, but I shrugged it off.

Okay... Quun gets fox ears, Frei can have cat ears...and I've got rabbit ears for Allis.

The kids, who were now at least two degrees cuter than usual, all started playing around and laughing with each other.

...Damn, this is pretty great.

There was a set of round mouse ears too, but I decided to hide those away. We were making a theme park, so I felt like that was just tempting interdimensional legal trouble.

"Seems like everyone's having fun."

"Mhm. The kids are really having a good time. I'm glad. We'll have to make sure our own park is as good as this."

Yumina and I smiled as we watched over the laughing kids. A theme park needed to be fun, so I hoped we could make a good one too.

"Where would you all like me to take you next?"

"Hm... We just exercised our bodies here, so how about a place to exercise the mind?" Leen quickly piped up in response to Cesca's question.

Exercising the mind? Like a quiz or puzzle corner?

"Hmhm... An intellectual area, you mean? The wood zone sounds best, then. Let's be off."

Cesca touched the monolith and we headed through the portal once more. A blinding light filled our vision before dissipating and revealing a new landscape.

"What's this...?"

We were in a vast garden. It wasn't just a basic garden, though, as we were standing on a slightly elevated area overlooking a massive hedge maze. It was a veritable labyrinth of green.

"Wow, amazing!"

“This is the labyrinthian garden. It’s actually a creation of yours truly, Francesca,” Cesca puffed her chest out with pride as she spoke. That made sense, all things considered. Cesca was the terminal gynoid assigned to Babylon’s garden. Her ability when it came to cultivating plant life was second to none. She regularly came down to stun and shock the royal gardeners at the castle.

In the middle of the maze, I could see that there was a big white gazebo and a beautiful rose garden. I’d seen gardens like this back on Earth.

“We could probably make something like this in Brunhild.”

Hell, you could make it anywhere with Earth magic. I bet nobles would love the idea of having private maze gardens.

“Oh, don’t simply judge this garden at a glance. This maze is a fantastic attraction filled with fascinating tricks. It’s no mere greenery.”

“...That isn’t really reassuring.”

Frankly, anything fascinating to Cesca was immediately suspicious to me. Part of me wanted to pack up and go home immediately.

“Hm... So if the rose garden in the middle is the goal...where’s the entrance?” Leen tapped her chin as she glanced over the maze and asked that question. She raised a good point. I couldn’t actually see any entrances. Was it incomplete, perhaps?

Cesca simply pointed over at a stone platform nearby. It was elevated, resembled a manhole, and the stone was engraved with magical etchings. Then I noticed another stone circle next to it. One was white, while the other was blue. I had no idea what they were.

“The blue circle is connected to the exit. It’s how you leave the middle area. The white circle is the entrance. It’ll drop you at a random position within the labyrinth.”

“Interesting... So the starting point is randomized, then?”

“Indeed. Don’t worry, though. After a certain period of time, all participants will be warped to the exit. It’s impossible to become lost forever. If you don’t want to participate, you’re also free to join me at the exit.”

Oh, I don’t have to join in this time? This one might be a bit tricky, to be honest... Think I’ll just sit it out.

“This sounds fun!”

“Dad, c’mon! Let’s do it!”

Frei and Linne began tugging at my sleeves. Their tails were frantically swishing.

Crap... They’re too cute! H-How can I sit out when they’re begging me like this?!

Elze, Linze, Hilde, Leen, Sakura, and Sue said they wanted to participate. Yumina, Lu, and Yae decided to sit it out, though. The latter three didn’t seem like the type to enjoy a maze as much, so that seemed fair.

Elze and Hilde weren’t all that interested, but they had to acquiesce to their daughter’s demands. Leen also wasn’t tremendously interested, but Quun implored her to join in because she was curious about what made the maze an intellectually stimulating attraction.

As for Ende’s group, Melle and Lycee opted out. Allis seemed like she was raring to go, though.

“Very well, then. Step in one at a time. Your position will be randomized, and you’ll be spaced out evenly. Order doesn’t matter. There will be blue teleport spots within the maze if you get tired and wish to forfeit.”

Well, at least there’s an easy way out... Guess if I get tired I can just bail on it. That’s not so bad.

“Let’s gooooo!” Linne roared as she dashed forward, her wolf ears twitching excitedly. She hopped onto the white stone and warped away.

“Oh, Touya. Look. It’s Linne.”

“Huh?”

Lu pointed over at the maze, and I could make out Linne’s figure... Just barely, though. She was quite a way away from the goal.

Wow, that’s some distance to cover... Hm... So how does she get to the goal from there? I can’t actually... Hrm... Let’s see...

As I looked over the maze, I saw other little blips appear where the kids warped in.

Eventually, it was my turn. I stepped up on the stone and my vision changed in a flash. In front of me was a long pathway flanked by three-meter hedges, while behind me was a dead end.

No choice but to go forward, I guess! Wonder if I should turn left or right at the end here...

There were various methods to get out of mazes, but a famous trick was to place one hand on a wall and keep it there, using it to guide your way through and prevent yourself from getting mixed up. However, that method kind of relied on having a proper starting point...and for all I knew, I was in the middle of the maze, so using that technique could result in me walking in circles.

“Well, whatever, I’ll just take it as I go.”

I turned right at the end of the path. Why? It just felt like the...right thing to do! That was all there was to it.

I took another right turn and found myself in front of a dead end... Or rather, there was a large door in my way.

“What is this?” I mumbled as I grabbed the knob and tried to open it. However, it wouldn’t budge. When I looked more closely at the door, I noticed a golden plaque on it... I could barely make out the writing, which seemed to be in Partheno’s language.

I was just about to activate my translation magic, but the text suddenly switched into something I could understand without me doing anything. Cesca’s work, no doubt.

Okay, let’s see what this says...

“Sing as loud as you can and the path shall open.”

...What? What the hell is this? Ugh... I definitely should’ve sat out...

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“Sing as loud as you can and the path shall open.”

The moment I saw those words engraved on the door, I turned around and walked away.

...I have to sing loud, here? Seriously? I’d rather not... Pass.

I headed back and took another path this time. Then, I hit another junction after a little while, so I took a right.

“Hey, hold it...”

I thought I’d hit the same door again, but this one was colored a little differently. I narrowed my eyes as I read what was engraved on the golden plaque by the door. With any luck, it wouldn’t ask me to sing again.

“Take off your clothes and flex those bulging muscles. Only then shall the path open.”

“CESCAAAAAA!” I screamed out to the heavens in contempt for a certain maid, who was probably waiting at the goal already.

Why would I flex my muscles here?! I don't even really have bulging muscles! Sure I'm pretty toned, since I train with Moroha and all, but I'm not on the level of the beastking, or the king of Felsen!

"Damn it... So it's singing or flexing..."

I didn't mind the singing part, but the part specifying I had to be loud was annoying. This place wasn't soundproof, so people nearby could've been able to hear me. That'd be embarrassing... If only Sakura were with me, she'd have been happy to sing.

...Maybe I should flex? It's not like anyone'll see me, right? And I only have to do it for a moment...

I took off my coat, revealing the basic shirt beneath. I rolled up one of my sleeves and flexed my bicep. A beep rang out, and the color at the bottom of the door changed slightly. I rolled up my other sleeve and flexed that bicep. Another beep came, and more of the door changed color. About a tenth of the door, starting at the bottom, was now a fresh color.

...Is it changing color based on me flexing? Do I have to change the whole door before it opens? This is goddamn ridiculous!

I flexed my biceps again, but the color didn't change.

Crap... Do I have to show off a different muscle?

I sighed and took my shirt off, revealing my bare upper body. It wasn't cold, thankfully enough, since the local area seemed to have a regulated temperature. I didn't really know how to flex, though... It wasn't something I'd made a habit of doing before.

Uhhh...

I tried to pose like a bodybuilder, tensing both of my biceps at once. If I remembered right, that was called the double biceps pose. The name was fairly self-explanatory. I wasn't exactly a bodybuilder, though... The color only changed a little bit more. If I was more buff, I had a feeling it might've filled up more. I turned around and struck

the same pose, this time tensing my back as well. This time I was showing off a rear double biceps pose. Even though my back muscles were fairly pitiful, the door acknowledged them. I got a little into it, so I turned to my side and puffed out my chest. The door continued rising in color.

I put all my strength into the next pose, turning straight toward the door and flexing with two fists balled up in front of me. It was the ultimate bodybuilding pose! The ultra flex! The color finally rose up to the limit, and the door opened up with a clatter...revealing Quun on the other side, staring at me in disbelief.

“Uh?”

Her expression was blank for a moment, but it quickly turned into a grin. She whipped out her phone and snapped a photo of me.

“W-Wait! You can’t take a picture of me without permission!”

“I wasn’t aware you were this kind of deviant, father. Goodness me... I’ll have to tell mother about this.”

“W-Wait, hold on! I was just following the instructions! Look here!”

I gestured to the plaque on the door. I didn’t want my kid thinking I was some weird exhibitionist... Though I did get a little carried away. Quun looked over the plaque, then shrugged and nodded. Thankfully, she seemed to understand the situation.

“The requirement was different on the other side. Though it seems once it’s opened once, you can freely use the door from then on.”

Quun opened the door and closed it a few times as if to illustrate her point. I glanced at the plaque on her side to see what the challenge would’ve been coming in from that way, and it said, “If you go ten seconds without blinking, the door shall surely open.”

The hell? That one’s way easier. Does the challenge vary by person or something?

“It’s a dead end back where I came from, father. What about your way?”

“Oh, uh, there’s another door, but...” I put my shirt back on as I explained the layout I’d experienced to Quun. I considered asking her to delete that photo, but I had a feeling it was a lost cause.

If the passage she’d come from was a dead end, then I’d have no choice but to sing. The thought was embarrassing... But my daughter had just caught me flexing my muscles, so maybe it wasn’t actually so bad. Plus, Quun could sing...or the two of us could sing together. That was a bit less embarrassing than singing on my own.

I headed to the other door with Quun. The inscription was still the same, as I expected it to be. Once Quun finished reading it, a cruel grin spread across her face.

“Well then, father. Feel free to sing as much as you like.”

“Huh?! What about you?!”

Wh-What?! I thought you’d at least sing with me! Damn it. If I knew things were gonna pan out this way then I’d have just chosen this door to begin with!

“...C-Can’t we uh...together?”

“Sing.”

“But, uh, if there’s two of us...”

“Sing.”

Damn it all... She’s not gonna let me get out of this without singing, is she? What am I even gonna sing?

My preference greatly tilted toward music from the West over Japanese music. I felt a bit more confident singing Western songs, too, since the people around me usually couldn’t understand the lyrics.

In the end, I settled on one of my grandpa's favorites. It was a song by an early pop singer from the 1950s. The song was apparently about a boy's feelings for an older woman. Namely, his younger brother's babysitter. He made his debut with the song at the age of sixteen and quickly rose to stardom. His lyrics felt almost prayer-like in their quality, the way he discarded the shackles of age and professed a pure kind of adoration.

When the song ended, the door clattered open.

Whew...

I looked off to the side and saw Quun snickering... Then I saw the phone in her hand.

"This'll make for a fine video."

"What?!"

Erase that! No! Stop playing it! I don't wanna hear my own voice! Nooo! I'm gonna cringe, stop it!

"...By the way, the woman you were singing about isn't a lover of yours, is she?"

"Obviously not! It's just the song lyrics!"

Don't say stuff like that, you moron! My wives'll chop me up and put me in a stew!

Quun teased a little more before finally snickering and slipping her phone into her pocket. She was a wretched little thing at times.

"The way's clear, father. Let us proceed apace."

"Ugh... Fine..." I dejectedly followed after Quun. The pathway snaked left and right a few times, but there were no crossroads to choose between. It took a while for us to reach our next one.

"Which way?"

"I'm not really picky, Quun. Wherever you think's best."

“Hm... I have a feeling if we go left, we might loop back, so let's go right.”

I followed after Quun and headed down the rightward path. After some time, we heard a girl's voice.

“Bwuh! Another dead end! Jeez!”

“That voice...”

“It's Linne.”

Apparently, Linne was right on the other side of the hedge. We stopped when we heard her.

“Linne! You there?”

“Linne?”

“Huh? Daaad? Quun?”

Her voice came back from the other side, confirming our suspicions.

“Are you two together? No fair... I wanna be there too!”

“Well, we just happened to meet up...”

It wasn't like I'd planned to bump into Quun. If the path took us to Linne, we'd be able to join up too.

“Oh, I know! I can jump over the hedge!”

Just as I was about to question whether or not that was a good idea, I heard a dull thud, a yelp of pain, and then a clatter as if Linne had fallen to the ground.

“H-Hey, you okay?!”

“Owie... I bumped my head... There's some kinda invisible roof up there!”

Apparently, there was some manner of force field above the maze that prevented one from leaping over the hedges.

“Don’t bother trying again. If we’re lucky, we’ll be able to meet up along the way. I’d suggest you keep moving for now.”

“Aww... Okay. I’ll keep moving for now.”

I listened closely and heard the sound of Linne dashing off. Quun and I proceeded as well, hoping that we might be able to bump into Linne along the way.

After a short time, we came to a small open space... It was some kind of plaza. The area was the size of a small garden, with a signpost in the middle and another one of those annoying doors on the other side. We headed toward the sign in the middle of the area, only for a trap to trigger! The ground rose up and covered the entrance we’d just come in from, sealing us in!

“...Take the bird into your hand and the door shall surely open...”

I was befuddled, but then a chicken suddenly manifested out of thin air.

“CLUCK. CLUCK. CLUCK. BAWK. CLUCK.”

...Why is it speaking in a baritone voice?! Why is it perfectly pronouncing the words instead of making the actual chicken sounds?

I eyed the chicken suspiciously... It was kind of freaking me out. It had powerful, alluring eyes. I’d never seen a chicken so handsome in my life.

“That’s the bird the sign’s talking about, right?”

“Presumably. If we can catch it, the door should open.”

Sounds easy enough. Let’s get it done.

I walked over to the chicken, but it promptly started shaking and dashed away from me.

Ugh...

I approached it. It fled. I approached it again. It fled again. I ran in fast! It ran away just as swiftly!

“BAWK. BAWK. BAAAWK.”

I chased the chicken with all my might.

This thing’s fast! It’s no ordinary chicken at all! I knew it! If I could only use [Accel], this thing would be done for!

“Everything okay, father?”

“Huh?! Oh, uh, ha ha ha! Yeah! All good! Lemme get it, don’t worry about it!”

Crap! If I don’t hurry up I’m gonna lose all my daughter’s respect!

I changed my approach, slowly backing the chicken into a corner and making a feint... I had it trapped like a rat...except it was a chicken, so it was trapped like a chicken! When the chicken stopped moving, I made a diving tackle toward it.

You’re mine, shitbird!

But before I could grab it, the chicken spread its wings wide and flew up into the air.

...What the hell?!

“BAAAWK. BAAAWK.”

The chicken landed on my head and jumped off behind me. I turned around, glaring at it... I could only see mockery in its eyes. It was taunting me, silently making light of my ineptitude.

You little bastard! Who do you think you are, huh?! How about I come over there and—

“Pff... Are you doing alright there, father?”

“Ha ha... Ha ha ha ha... H-He’s just a slippery little guy, is all.”

I groaned quietly and took my coat off, handing it over to Quun for safekeeping. I wasn't going to forgive this chicken... It had humiliated me, made a mockery of me... This chicken had to learn who was boss!

"Goodness me... What childish things men can be..."

I heard Quun's murmuring, but I pretended not to. There were some battles a man couldn't turn away from, and while this wasn't a battle, it was still pretty damn important!

Your mocking days are over, chicken! I'm not gonna take it anymore! I'm gonna put an end to you and your cruel, silent judgment!

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"There we go!"

"BAWKBAWKBAWWWWK!"

A short while later, I successfully had the chicken caught by the neck.

That's what you get, you little bastard!

"Heh heh heh heh... Now... Shall we fry you up? Serve you with some noodles? How about some tasty chicken nanban, huh?!"

"BAWK?! CAWCAWBAAAAAAWK?!"

"Father... Are you sure this is the best use of our time?" Quun's irritated muttering snapped me back to my senses.

Damn it all... I've made a fool of myself in front of her!

Just as I wondered how to make the situation better, the chicken vanished from my grasp in a puff of smoke.

Huh? What happened?

"The door's open now. Let's carry on."

"Oh, sure."

Quun went through the newly-opened door, so I followed on after her.

Maybe she always saw me as a fool...

"Fear not. I recorded your encounter with the bird."

"You what?!"

Why does she keep recording humiliating stuff like that?!

My shoulders slumped, but Quun simply giggled. She certainly liked taking photos and videos...

"It's something of a hobby... I'll likely outlive everyone around me, you know... Most of my family included. No harm in chronicling things so I don't forget, right?"

Mmm... I guess that's something I hadn't considered.

My children were beneficiaries of God Almighty's blessing through my own divinity, and that effectively made them demigods. They had considerable potential compared to other people, but their lifespans weren't that much longer than the rest of their kind.

Out of all my kids, Quun would probably live the longest. She was a fairy, after all. She was only ten years old, but she was already thinking about preserving our memories... That was kind of rough.

I reached out to stroke Quun's silver hair, ruffling it gently. My daughter closed her eyes and smiled.

"Don't worry, father. I have a long life ahead of me, so I'll probably be the last to marry. I'll stay with you the longest."

"Hm... I'm not so sure..."

I'd be sad to see her married off too soon, but I also wanted her to flourish as an adult...

"I'll be sure to marry before I reach six hundred."

“That’s a long time!”

We carried on through the hedge maze, talking about a topic that would probably annoy Leen. Eventually, we came to a branching path again... It was another left or right choice.

“Father.”

“Huh?”

Quun suddenly tugged at my sleeve. She pointed down the rightward path. I looked over at where she was pointing and saw a very distressed Elna dashing our way.

“D-Dad! Quun!”

“Elna?”

She ran right toward us and gave me a big hug. Then, she hugged Quun with all her might. The poor little thing had tears in her eyes.

“Thank goodness... I kept hearing other people, but I couldn’t get to them...so I just kept walking in circles...” Elna said she’d bumped into several doors, but she didn’t want to go through most of them.

Seems smart to me. You shouldn’t have to force yourself to do things you don’t want to do! We’ll get out of here together, no problem.

“What kind of stuff were the doors telling you to do?”

“Ah? Uhm...one of them said...show me your o-face? And another one said to whisper sweet nothings... I didn’t really understand...”

“CESCAAAA!” I cursed the name of our idiotic maid.

Stop trying to teach my kid weird stuff, damn it! That’s my little girl you’re messing with, you psycho!

Elna seemed more confused than anything else, and even Quun was frowning. She was clearly as annoyed by the gratuitous sexual harassment as I was.

“Quun... What’s an o-face?”

“You don’t need to know that right now, Elna. Just calm down, it’ll be okay.”

Quun gave her sister a big hug and a gentle smile. Elna glanced at me, question marks practically showing in her eyes, but she shrugged and accepted the sisterly cuddle.

We continued on, as a trio, down the left-hand side.

Are we gonna be able to get out any time soon? If I could see it from above that’d be easier, but there’s a damn barrier in the way. I can’t even use magic... Wait... Hold on a second. We can’t use magic because there’s a mana dampening effect in place, yeah? So we can’t access texting, the phone map, and other functions that rely on atmospheric mana... But Quun’s camera still works! So only the internet and phone parts of the smartphones don’t work. The mass-produced smartphones, at least. How could I forget the fact that my phone’s different? It’s a sacred treasure! I could use it even back on Earth, a place with no atmospheric mana. If that’s the case, then maybe...

As Quun and Elna walked on ahead, I took my phone out and quietly tried to activate the map app.

“...Ha ha! Bingo!”

“What is it, dad?”

“Huh?! Oh, uh, nothing!”

“Really?”

I spoke quietly, but I couldn’t help but strike a victory pose...prompting Elna to turn around and question me.

...Crap. Hopefully she doesn’t think I’m being suspicious.

I looked down at my phone with a wide grin on my face. The map worked perfectly... I could see my current location, as well as the layout of the entire maze.

This is God Almighty's power... This is how I win! Thanks, old man! With this, I can finally win back some fatherly pride!

As I quietly gave my thanks, my phone vibrated. It was a text message from God Almighty.

Huh?

I narrowed my eyes and read what it said. 'Do not play dirty! You cannot win respect through cheap tricks!'

...He's watching me?! And judging me too?! Maaan!

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"Oh! Father!"

"Elna's there too!"

I turned my head and saw two figures bounding toward me. One had cat ears, while the other had wolf ears. They both kicked off the ground and hug-tackled me.

Ack?!

"Bwaugh!"

I took two heavy hits to the upper body, but I still managed to stay on my feet.

Crap... I'm gonna break my spine! Aaagh!

"Frei, Linne... Don't divebomb our father. Our mothers will scold you, you know?"

"Aww... But it's fun..."

"Ohhh... I don't wanna get lectured by mother again..."

Quun's words caused the two girls to back off.

My spine... My spiiine... Gh... [Cure Heal]!

I applied some recovery magic to myself... Those girls were way too powerful.

Linne scurried around me, her wolfish ears flickering.

“Where are our moms?”

“Not sure... We haven’t seen Linze and the others yet.”

“Aww...”

What, is your dad not enough? How lonely...

“Come to think of it, all your daughters are here. Are you happy about that, father?”

“Sure I am... But it’s just a coincidence...” Quun snickered at me, but I wasn’t sure if it actually was a coincidence... This game was set up by that idiotic maid, so there was no guarantee this wasn’t all going the way she wanted it to.

“...Is this a plot to bring all my daughters together and show them my worst sides, perhaps...”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

Quun had gazed at me so coldly... Elna had gotten suspicious of me...

Was I just dancing in the palm of her hand?! Was this the intent the whole time?!

“Let’s put father’s paranoia aside and move on for now. Maybe we’ll find our mothers.”

Quun led the way, and all the girls followed.

She’s right... I shouldn’t dwell on it. Let’s just keep going for now.

We headed the opposite way to where Linne and Frei had come from. We carried on, passing some tricky doors along the way...but it

went relatively well overall. Despite the hangups, it felt like we were nearing our goal.

“Ohhh! It’s Mama Yumina!” Linne shouted as she turned a corner.

I turned the same one and saw a straight path to an open area. The sight brought me an immense sense of relief. I saw Yumina, Yae, Lu, Melle, and Lycee. They were sitting around a table, sipping tea. It was everyone who hadn’t participated.

Damn it... I should’ve skipped this one with them... Either way, we’ve made it... We’re at the goal! There can’t be any more tricks between here and there, right? Right?

“I’m gonna be fiiirst!” Linne roared as she dashed ahead.

Wait!

I charged full pelt forward and got ahead of Linne. I wasn’t trying to steal victory from her or anything, that’d be a little bit too petty.

I know this trick! There’s always a final trap right in front of the goal! I gotta make sure it’s safe!

As I stepped forward, my feet started sinking into the ground.

Oh?!

“Daaad?!”

And then I heard the sound of a package breaking open above me... I fell forward, covered in white powder.

This... This is way too elaborate!

Thankfully, I didn’t get hurt by the impact. There were cushions in the pitfall I’d collapsed into. It wasn’t that deep either.

“D-Dad. Are you okay?!”

“Yeah... I’m okay... I’m used to this by now...” I said as I smiled up at Elna, who seemed overly concerned.

Blegh... It got in my mouth... Why'd she have to burst a bag of flour over me?

I crawled out of the pit, dusting the flour off me. Linne and the others started patting me to dust it off too, but they were hitting me a little bit too hard... It started to hurt...

"Let's cross the goal together!"

At Frei's urging, the four girls grabbed my arms. We all ran across the goal together. Yumina and the others were already waiting to greet us with a cheerful round of applause.

...I'm not sure whether to be happy or embarrassed.

"Congratulations. You're the first to arrive."

"Oh, really? Where are the others?"

"Still inside. Seems like they're having a hard time."

Cesca gestured toward a large monitor suspended over the garden square. When I turned to see what she'd pointed out, I saw Elze and Linze stacking rectangular blocks together in a big pile.

Oof... It collapsed... Elze looks like she's just about had it...

There was another feed. This one showing Sue and Sakura jumping along circles on the ground. It was like they were playing a rhythm game.

Huh... So you can see everything from here...

Wait... WAIT!

"...Hey, uh, you guys didn't see me earlier, right?"

Yumina and the others averted their gaze.

...They saw me. Oh god, they saw me... It wasn't just my daughters who've seen a bad side of me today... It was my wives too... And Ende's wives! Damn this twisted game!

“U-Uhm... I think your vocal performance was lovely!” Lu exclaimed, breaking the silence.

S-Stop... Please just stop... My HP bar’s already at zero... I should never have joined this game. I should’ve known the moment I knew Cesca was in charge. How many times has she ruined my day, now?

“Hey, dad! It’s the exit! Moms are there, and the others!”

I saw Ende, Allis, and Ney coming toward the finish line. Something told me the fact that they’d grouped up wasn’t a coincidence either.

Allis ran toward us.

Huh? The pit’s gone... Wait, no...it’s just covered again! It reset!

“Allis! Jump!”

“Huh? Ah! Hup!”

Allis found her bunny ears twitching in response to Melle’s call. She quickly leaped into the air, avoiding the trap and clearing the goal.

Allis ran over to Melle, who pulled her into a big hug while Lycee ruffled her hair.

“Jeez, we finally got to the— GAAAH!”

“Endymion?!”

Oh, Ende fell into the trap...

Ney failed to stop him from tumbling forward and getting covered in flour.

...Cesca, please don’t strike a victory pose. You’re being too obvious.

“...” Ende quietly squirmed out of the hole, covered in flour. He then patted himself down before glancing over at me. He must have noticed the flour clinging to my hair and shoulders. All he could offer was a wry smile.

...I know how you feel, man... But hey, let's just be thankful our kids were spared this fate...

Eventually, Sue arrived with Sakura, Elze with Linze, and Hilde with Leen. I made sure to warn them all about the pitfall.

"It was harder than I thought it'd be..."

"The maze was fun enough, but I could've gone without all the traps and tricks. We'll remove them when it comes to making our own, I hope."

I couldn't help but agree with Hilde. We wanted to make this an enjoyable attraction for kids and parents alike, rather than a hellhole.

"So, what next?"

"I want to ride a roller coaster! Do they have one here?"

"A roly coaster? I'm afraid I know of no such thing," Cesca said that and shrugged her shoulders in response to Frei's question. Ende, Melle, Ney, and Lycee seemed equally confused...but my family knew about them.

I assumed that my kids must have ridden one in the future...or something like that.

Sue, Sakura, Yae, and Lu seemed excited about roller coasters too. They hadn't ridden one before, but they knew them from videos I'd shown them. Hilde, Elze, and Yumina looked more nervous about the prospect. Leen and, perhaps more surprisingly, Linze didn't really seem all that concerned.

When you think about it, Linze's Helmwige is an aerial specialist... When it transforms into flight mode, it probably feels like being on a roller coaster. She might just be used to it at this point.

"A roller coaster is an amazing ride! You go on rails! You spin around! You fall and drop...and even fly upward!"

Hold on, Frei... Fly? What the hell did the future me build?!

“Then it’s a vehicle... It must be a ride that pushes fear, excitement, and other such feelings to the limit. In that case, the wind zone may be the closest approximation.”

Huh... Do they have a roller coaster here after all? I guess even ancient civilizations must have had thrill seekers. Then again, I guess it makes sense. Doc Babylon’s kind of the ultimate thrill seeker, and this was her personal testing ground...

Cesca placed her hand on a monolith, triggering the portal once more. Our kids cheerily charged through, and we followed after them. I passed through the gateway, and light filled my vision once more. When it cleared, I saw a wonderful sight.

The first thing that came to mind was an old western cowboy movie. It was a dry, desert area. A red rock canyon stretching as far as the eye could see. There was a wooden building in front of us that resembled some kind of old-fashioned train station. It was the only building here... I saw a cactus in the distance. Or at least...I assumed it was a cactus. For some reason, it seemed more menacing than usual, but that was probably my imagination.

“This is a facility in which you can ride a magical train and see various scenes. I believe if I modify it slightly, it should become similar to what Lady Frei described as a roly coaster.”

A magic train, huh? I heard the ancient civilization had those, but I didn’t think they’d use them recreationally. So this must be a station, huh?

They’d excavated a train from some ancient ruins in Felsen, so the first new magic train in five thousand years was currently being developed over there. With the support of our ether liquid and mana batteries, of course.

When I entered the station, I saw a rather compact magic train inside... It was actually quite similar in appearance to a roller coaster. It was made up of several connected small cars. But unlike a roller coaster, they had roofs. It could hold up to ten people in total. Each cart had room for two people, and there were five overall. That meant we'd have to split the group up and do two rides.

I glanced over at the rail, but it was more like a plate than anything else. It was made of earth, and kind of resembled those toy train tracks you could connect... At least it wasn't made of plastic. I looked a little closer at the rail and noticed it was cut off a little bit ahead.

Wait...is this unfinished?

"No, the rear panels shift forward as the train moves forward. It connects instantly, allowing the rail to move indefinitely beyond any one set track."

"Oh! A shifting auto-rail! I've heard of that before, but I've yet to see it in action!" Quun's eyes lit up as she responded to Cesca. So apparently my future roller coaster didn't use this system.

"So...who's riding?"

"Umm... Hilde, Leen, Elze, Linze. You can go with your respective daughters. We can decide the rest of the seating through rock paper scissors."

I figured it'd be less scary for the kids if their mothers were with them... Though I had a feeling for some of them, their mothers might be more scared.

When Ende heard my suggestion, he turned to his daughter, "Hey Allis. Wanna ride with me?"

"Uh? Naw. I wanna ride with one of my moms!"

Ende looked absolutely dejected upon hearing that. A rock, paper, scissors match began between Melle, Ney, and Lycee to determine

who had the honor of riding with Allis. At first I was surprised they knew how to play the game, but I realized they'd probably picked it up from seeing kids play it in Brunhild.

"All right, let's do ours too. The winners can ride first, then the losers can ride after."

Hopefully I lose pretty fast so I can see it in action... If it looks bad, maybe I should just back out. All right! Time to lose! I'm pretty bad at rock, paper, scissors... Just gotta count on that bad luck!

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Eventually, the pairings were decided. I ended up winning the tenth round...so I just barely made it into the first group.

Why didn't I lose, damn it?! Well...it's whatever... Maybe it'll be okay...

"Why'd I have to get saddled with you..."

"I won ninth, and you won tenth..."

Ende, who sat next to me on the coaster, sighed quietly.

Well...it is what it is...

The pairings ended up being Hilde and Frei, Yae and Sakura, Lu and Lycee, Leen and Quun, then Ende and me.

Yumina very suspiciously lost against me at the last second. I had a feeling she'd peeked into the future... She was usually a guaranteed winner.

"Hey, Touya. There are no seat belts... Is this safe?"

"I was wondering the same thing."

Roller coasters usually had a device that strapped you in for safety purposes... But this wasn't a roller coaster by design, so maybe it'd be fine. There was a handrail to hold, but that didn't really do much to soothe my nerves.

“Worry not. Once it starts operating, gravity magic will trigger and hold you in place. Even if you were jostled enough to throw you out, you’d stay safe. It’s quite fine.”

“...That isn’t reassuring.”

...Jostled enough to throw us out? Is she just exaggerating?

“How’s the track on this thing, anyway?”

“Track? This ride is variable, I can manually adjust how it operates. Just as I was asked, I’ve ensured it’ll terrify and thrill.”

With that, Cesca slapped a touch screen on the platform. Then she did it again. And again. And again. And again. It started to frantically beep.

I don’t know what that does, but she’s pushing it too much! Is she trying to max it out?!

“Safe travels, and good luck.”

“W-Wait! What does that mean?!”

Before I had the chance to question Cesca any further, the train whooshed on ahead.

I turned around and saw the track panels behind us vanishing. That meant they were going around the front... The shape of the track was a complete mystery, though...

“T-Touya, it’s ascending!”

I looked ahead and noticed the train was slowly rising into the air at a gradual incline.

“How’s it floating like that? Spatial magic, maybe?” Quun, who was sitting in front of me, was already mulling over the mechanics of the ride. She was a bit calm... Much like her mother in that regard, really. They both had the same spirit of curiosity, that was for sure.

We continued ascending into the sky... I could see more of the zones in the distance. I narrowed my eyes at a certain point far away and saw the Slime ranch.

“H-Hey, just how high are we going?!” Ende asked, looking tremendously nervous.

...I thought this was just gonna be like a normal roller coaster, but we're just going higher and higher... Anyone would get anxious.

It was wrong of me to assume this would work like a regular coaster... It was an ancient train, after all. I waited with bated breath as the train continued ascending... And then I saw it... A sharp, perpendicular drop right ahead!

“Gah!”

I felt an insane wind pressure as I dropped. I was used to heights due to my liberal use of the **[Fly]** spell, but even I couldn't help but be terrified as we hurtled toward the ground. Just before we made impact with the earth below, the train pulled up rapidly and began twisting... My vision inverted, my whole body spun upside down. We were doing a big loop.

“AAAAAGH!” Ende was screaming uncontrollably by my side. It was probably a good thing he hadn't ridden with Allis... Her image of him would've been shattered... But honestly, if I was riding with one of my girls, they'd think the exact same thing of me...

The train looped twice, thrice, and then began soaring freely through the air. It reached a certain height, then plunged into a downward spiral again. It was intense. The strain on my body from the pure centrifugal force was more intense than anything I'd ever felt before!

Whoa!

I thought we were running straight again, but before I could even process it, we were above a pond, looping and dipping just above the surface of the water.

Make it stoop!

Suddenly, the cart in front of us vanished into thin air. Leen and Quun were gone...and so were all the other carts in front of them. I was so confused. Ende and I were now completely on our own, speeding through a forested area.

“H-Hey, Touya. What happened?!”

“How am I supposed to know?!”

We were just two guys on a roller coaster in the middle of a forest. I had no idea why we’d been split up, but I hoped the others were doing okay.

“Agh! Look out ahead!” Ende’s screaming alerted me to the fact that we were hurtling full-speed toward a huge tree.

We’re gonna crash?!

Just as we were about to hit the tree, the cart moved and we narrowly avoided it... We sighed in relief, but it looped back and barely avoided the tree again... And again... And again!

Cesca’s doing this on purpose!

The train kept on ducking between trees at extreme speed. It was terrifying!

“Touya, over there!”

“Huh?”

I looked over at where Ende was pointing and saw a hole in the dusty earth.

“It’s a cave... Oh no, don’t tell me...”

“Yeah... It’s gonna happen...”

Just as we assumed it would, the train plunged into the opening and carried us into the depths of the earth.

Goddammit!

I could hear wings flapping in the dim light.

Did something just hit me in the face?! Wh-What the hell’s in here with us?! This isn’t a roller coaster anymore!

“GYAAAAAAAAAAH!”

The two of us could do nothing but scream as the train hurtled through the darkness.

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Meanwhile...

“Found you... The king of Panaches himself... Oh, sorry. The prince right now. I have a favor to ask of you, milord.”

“Hm? Have we met before? You have a familiar face... Does Blau remember you, perhaps?”

Prince Robert of Panaches, the pumpkin pants prince, tilted his head as he spoke to Distortion Blau. The blue crown shook its head slowly.

They were in Panacheria, royal capital of Panaches. As Robert made his usual rounds, he was approached by a peculiar young girl. She looked to be around seven or eight years old. Her silvery-green hair was cut short, down to her neck. Her eyes were emerald green. They had a small slant to them, betraying a tenacity beyond her years. Her clothes were rather elegant, they were a design Robert had never seen before...and the two knives strapped at her waist rather offset the dainty look.

Robert sort of recognized her, but he was having trouble placing her. He felt more that he knew someone that resembled her, rather than the girl herself.

“If at all possible, I would like you to take me to Brunhild via your magic. I’m sure my...er... I’m sure the Grand Duke will appreciate you going to the trouble.”

“To Brunhild, you say? Are you perhaps related to Touya? Or, wait...one of his brides?” Robert asked, finally putting the pieces together. She resembled one of the grand duchesses of Brunhild. The one from the Regulus Empire, if he recalled correctly.

“More or less, yes... Good grief, though... To think I’d come out all the way here. And nobody’s answering their phone...” The girl was muttering something, but Robert wasn’t really sure what she meant. That aside, he didn’t detect any malicious intent in her.

“So, young lady, what might I call you?”

“Oh, please excuse me. I am Arcia. Arcia Brunhild. A pleasure to meet you, Prince Panaches,” the girl smiled warmly as she gave her greeting.





Chapter V: The Cook's Daughter

"That was so amazing!"

"Indeed. It certainly generated an exceptional force."

"How are they just talking about it so casually..." Ende muttered, his head still reeling as he looked over at Frei and Quun excitedly chattering.

I was completely limp. I had no energy to stand. It was kind of funny, really. I hadn't remembered roller coasters being quite so exhausting. I couldn't feel my feet. It wasn't just me and Ende, thankfully. Lu and Hilde looked completely defeated. Yae, Sakura, Leen, and Lycee were fine, though... It must've just varied from person to person.

"Jeez, dad! You really couldn't handle it?"

"Huh?! N-No, Allis! That's not it!"

Ende's daughter struck him right through the heart with her words. Not wanting to be the target of similar abuse, I quickly fixed my posture and acted cool. I didn't want to be put on his level, after all.

"Dad, are you okay?" Elna seemed concerned, so she tried comforting me.

My daughter... She's... She's so kind...

"I was nervous just watching..." Elze mumbled. She seemed more concerned about herself...

It'll be fine... You'll get used to it...

The second ride left the platform. This time it was carrying Linne and Linze, Elna and Elze, Allis and Melle, Ney and Sue, and Yumina on her own.

Wonder who'll thrive and who'll barely survive...

I sat in the station, opened up [Storage], and pulled out a nice cup of tea. Magic was apparently usable within the station, so that was nice.

After giving everyone else some tea, I finally felt like my jitters had settled.

The monolith next to Cesca began to glow blue. The gynoid set down her cup of tea and immediately started sliding her finger across it. I wondered what it meant.

“Worry not. It’s a call from Doctor Babylon,” Cesca said as she whipped her hand up, and an image of the doc was projected into the air.

“Yo, sorry to bug you on your big day out. I got a call from the castle saying they couldn’t get through to you.”

Wait, really? Our phones might be blocked, but mine should still be... Oh, crap. I turned mine off earlier when God Almighty told me off.

“The prince of Panaches arrived at your castle. But he fell asleep because he used his ability to get there.”

Huh... Yeah, I guess that’d happen. But what’s he doing in Brunhild? If he went with Blau, it might have been for something important.

“The issue isn’t the Prince. It’s the little friend he brought with him. The one claiming to be Lu’s daughter.”

“Huh?”

Lu, who was listening in on the video call, couldn’t help but let out a small murmur of confusion. She paused briefly, turned toward me, turned to the screen, then took another sip of her tea.

“WHAAAAAAT?! M-MY DAUGHTER?!”

A clatter rang out as she stood up, knocking her chair to the floor as she screamed tea out of her mouth. Talk about a delayed reaction.

I, on the other hand, wasn't quite so shocked by the news. It was the fifth time I'd heard it, after all.

"Why's she with Robert?"

"She appeared in Panaches, apparently. She then sought the prince out immediately and had him warp her to Brunhild."

...Jeez. There's taking initiative, and then there's that... I feel a bit bad for Robert, honestly. I'll have to apologize.

"That sounds like Arcy. She tends to do whatever she can to achieve her goals... But she's pretty direct..."

"Well, that's true enough. But she's largely harmless, you have to admit. She's never really caused major harm with it... Mostly... She can just run a little far with herself sometimes..." Frei and Quun sighed quietly as they shook their heads.

Sakura suddenly asked them a question. "Where does Arcia place in the order?"

"Fifth. Older than Elna."

That meant the order of birth was Yakumo, Frei, Quun, my fourth child, Arcia, Elna, Linne, my eighth child, and then my ninth.

"What about my Yoshino?"

"Yoshino was born after Quun... Ah, wait! You're trying to trick me!" Frei realized she was being coaxed for information and shut up. But the damage was already partially done. Now we knew Yoshino was our fourthborn. That meant Yumina and Sue's were the two youngest. It made sense in Sue's case, since she was the youngest of my wives... As I started to ponder the pregnancy order, Lu charged forward and grabbed me by the collar.

Gwegh!

“Let’s not waste any time! Arcia needs us, Touya! We need to leave at once!”

“Oh, uh, yeah... R-Right, sorry. Uh...I agree, but...”

The pressure she emanated was immense. I understood her feelings, but she needed to calm herself.

Quun let out a small sigh and walked over to break the tension.

“You two can go and meet with her. I’ll explain everything to the others when they’re done with their ride.”

“Thanks! Hey, Cesca! Get us out of here!”

“Wh—”

“Got it. Sending you now.”

Before I could even say anything, Lu had yelled over at Cesca and the two of us were out in Babylon’s garden.

“Let’s go, Touya! To the castle!”

“Right, I’m on it!”

I quietly hoped Lu would calm down as I activated **[Teleport]** to bring us both to the castle.

We manifested in the living room. Karen was there sitting on the couch, next to a small girl who looked to be about seven or eight. Prince Robert was sleeping in a guest room, apparently. The little girl immediately turned her eyes toward us. Her gaze was as sharp as her mother’s, carrying with it a beautiful emerald hue. She stood up, the motion bobbing her silver-green hair.

She looked familiar...and it was then I realized that I’d seen a vision of her through Doctor Babylon’s jewel so very long ago. She looked a

little older compared to that vision, though. But there was no doubt about it. This was Lu's daughter.

Lu took a big step forward.

"Are you... Arcia?"

"I am!"

Arcia ran forward with a huge smile on her face. Lu smiled too as she reached her arms out to hug her daughter...only for Arcia to run right past her and give me a big hug.

"It's so good to finally see you, father!"

"...Whuh?"

Lu slowly turned her head toward me. She was reeling with shock. So much that she hadn't even brought her outstretched arms back in yet.

Th-This isn't my fault... Probably...

"You're amazing in the future, father! But I must say, the past you is rather dashing as well!"

"Oh... Uh... Thanks?"

I didn't really know how to react to the sudden hug, so I just gave her a tight hug back. I was happy, but I certainly wasn't used to this kind of treatment.

"What?! Arcia?! Wh-What about your mother?!"

"You seem well. That's nice."

Arcia turned around and gave Lu a small curtsy before turning back to me. It was quite the mature greeting, but it stood as a stark contrast when put up against how she interacted with me.

“Arcy here loves Touya lots! But don’t worry, Lu. She loves you too! Just slightly differently!” Karen chuckled quietly as she watched from the couch.

...So she’s a serious daddy’s girl, huh? I don’t know whether to be happy or worried.

“It’s normal for daughters to love their fathers. That’s why I work hard every single day to ensure I’ll find a husband like you! Just like you, actually!” Arcia spoke proudly, but her words were more than a little dubious. Either way, she seemed like a sophisticated young girl.

“A husband?! Aren’t you a bit young?”

“How naive, mother. You should know that initiative is the key to a happy marriage. Or maybe you don’t know that, hm?”

H-Hold on! Don’t go bickering like this! This is a weird subject to get into... We just met, you know...

“Still, I’m glad you’re working to better yourself. Any daughter of mine should! You’re doing well, I hope.”

“Of course, mother. I happen to be a phenomenal cook, you know? I might even have surpassed most housewives out there...”

“Hoh...” Lu’s eyes narrowed. There was a clear competitive atmosphere.

“Well, you certainly talk big. Shall we put those skills to the test?”

“But of course. Why don’t we see how your skills are at this point in time, mother?”

The two girls sneered at each other.

Wait, hold on... What’s with the confrontational atmosphere all of a sudden?! Lu, aren’t you taking this a bit personally?

“Very well. Father, I know how to settle this. We’ll both cook something, and you can be the one to judge which is better.”

“That sounds good to me. Shall we choose what to cook? Or is it a specific meal?”

Uh...guys? I’m kind of losing control of the situation here... Neither of you even asked if I agreed to be the judge... I know I don’t really have a choice here, but it’d be nice if you pretended.

“It’ll be easier for him to judge if we make something similar... Let’s theme it around Japanese food, shall we?”

“Japanese cuisine, you say? Are you sure? I happen to have visited Touya’s homeland and partaken in authentic Japanese cuisine, myself.”

Uh...Lu? That authentic Japanese cuisine you had was just a meal at a regular family restaurant... I’m not really sure if it qualifies... Then again, who am I to say it doesn’t? Pork cutlets and gyudon are considered Japanese food... Even if they’re not in Japan. Maybe Japanese food is just anything with Japanese style attributed to it. Is hamburger steak Japanese food? Is it Japanese food if it’s eaten by a Japanese person? Maybe it’s a bit pointless trying to assign so many labels.

“Oh, I’m sure it’ll be no problem. After all...father’s given his personal seal of approval to my Japanese cuisine before. I can’t possibly lose.”

The two of them locked eyes again. The atmosphere quickly grew frightening. They were both smiling, but I could feel evil welling up behind their expressions. One thing was clear, though... They both hated losing. She really was Lu’s daughter.

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“So it turned into a cook-off, then...”

“Yeah, somehow...”

Yumina couldn’t help but sigh when I explained the situation to her. She didn’t seem amused.

In front of me sat a large dining table. It was flanked by two different kitchens. We were back in the miniature theme park... Or to be more specific, the fire zone. Cesca brought us here after I came back in with Lu and Arcia in tow.

We were about ready for lunch, but I wasn't sure how to feel about this. The middle of the table was stacked with various foodstuffs I'd removed from **[Storage]**. Lu and Arcia were both to freely use any of the ingredients to make their dishes. The two were already hard at work in their respective kitchens. Linze and Sue were on Lu's side, while all the kids were on Arcia's side.

"You're really into it, Lu..."

"Mhm... She's really confident. I think it's commendable."

"It's not just that... She has a real force of will. It's a drive to achieve her goals at any cost. The blood of the Regulus royal line at work, no doubt."

Yep. That adds up. The emperor of Regulus is pretty single-minded like that too. Can't go against your pedigree.

"I certainly won't complain about being served some pleasant food... But Touya, are you going to be able to judge fairly?"

"Well...it's just a matter of my preferences, right? It should be easy to say which one I like the most... It's not like it really matters who wins this..."

Ugh... Don't make me choose, please... My stomach's in knots just thinking about it... Urgggh...

If I were to judge off the bat, I'd say Lu would be the easy winner. She cooked for me just about every day. Three times a day, even. She knew the tastes and preferences of everyone in the castle, me included. It was obvious she'd be able to cook perfectly to my tastes.

I couldn't play favorites just because my daughter was cute either... Though I was tasting blindly, so I wouldn't actually know who cooked what.

"Hopefully this doesn't turn bad..."

I weathered the stomach ache as I waited for the food to finish cooking.

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Meanwhile, in the Arcia kitchen...

"Jeez... You're the same as ever, Arcy. Challenging mom like that right after seeing her..." Frei sighed quietly as she stood behind her sister. Most people tended to believe that Arcia loved her father so much that she had a problem with Lu, but Frei knew it was actually different. Arcia so desperately wanted validation from Lu that she constantly strove to be better. In short, she was a real pain in the butt.

"Are you gonna win, Arcia?"

"Can she win? I don't think she's ever outdone Mama Lu..."

"I don't care who wins. We're all gonna eat good!"

"Silence in the kitchen, children!" Arcia growled in irritation as she reached for a carrot. Elna, Linne, and Allis all shrunk back, silently grumbling that Arcia was a child as well.

"How do you think your chances are, Arcia? Would you have made the challenge if you thought you had no hope? We may be in the past, but our mother isn't one to be trifled with in the kitchen..." Quun leaned against a nearby wall as she made her doubtful comment.

Arcia simply responded with a grin as she clutched a radish, saying, "Hee hee hee hee... My dear Quun... Do you remember the meal I

served father some time ago? The one he lavished me with praise for?”

“Huh? Oh, something like...the one from his homeland that even our mother had never cooked for him... Wait, don’t tell me...”

Once the realization struck her, Quun couldn’t help but push herself off the wall and walk toward the middle of the kitchen. Frei too realized what Arcia was planning.

“Precisely... The first meal I was ever truly praised for... One that I know my mother hasn’t made yet! One I know my father hasn’t eaten yet! One that I can’t possibly lose with!” Arcia exclaimed as she thrust the radish skyward as if it were a sword. The girl was clearly a little overconfident... It might even be more appropriate to say she was drunk on her own ego.

A few of the kids in the kitchen piped up in unison with, “Cheeeaaater.”

To which Arcia replied... “Silence again, children!”

Allis, Quun, and Frei found themselves rebuked once more.

Frei had a few more words for her sister, however.

“I’m not saying it’s cowardly, but...won’t it make the first time you serve it less special later on? Is there any point?”

“In father’s homeland, there’s a turn of phrase. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. In other words, I need to win at any cost!”

“I’m not really sure if that’s right... But okay...” Frei wondered if it was fair to use such underhanded tactics against their own mother, but she knew she couldn’t stop Arcia at this point. After all, Arcia was a girl who kept her eye on the prize at all times, for better and for worse.

“What about history, though? Won’t it change if he eats it here instead of in the future? Will the time spirits correct it or something?” Allis chimed in with her own curious comment. Elna and Linne tilted their heads in thought, but neither could come up with an answer.

“It’ll be fine. If anyone suffers as a result of this, it’ll only be the future me... Or well, maybe the present me! Or the past me! If I can defeat my mother, I’ll gladly drink deep of my own miserable fount.”

Quun wanted to mention that splitting the timeline here could potentially create a different Arcia who’d be negatively impacted, but she neglected to say anything. It was all a bit too complicated to think about.

No matter what happened, Granny Tokie would probably take care of it. Probably, at least...

“I’ll win my father’s heart with this, no problem! Elna, help me out.”

“Oh, uh... Got it.”

Elna was the second-best cook of all the children. She was small, but she’d learned well by watching and copying. Fortunately, she was different from her mother Elze in that the dishes she cooked never came out horrendously spicy.

The other girls weren’t nearly as good at cooking as Arcia or Elna. The only one who could kind of do anything close to cooking was Yakumo, the eldest, so the only one suited to be an assistant cook was Elna.

Arcia pulled back her chopping knife and swung it down against the meat on the countertop.

“This is one game I can’t afford to lose!”

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“Oooh... Wow!”

Two tasty meals were lined up in front of me. Both were served with rice, miso soup, and pickled veggies. The only major difference was the meat. One was pork, while the other was chicken. Ginger-fried pork...and chicken nanban.

They were two quintessentially Japanese meals.

...Actually, is chicken nanban Japanese? Let's not worry about that right now. If even I'm not sure about that, nobody else here will know. No point bringing it up.

I'd had the ginger pork a few times since I'd come to this world, but I hadn't had chicken nanban in a very, very long time.

Wait...does Lu even know how to make it?

I couldn't tell who'd cooked which dish by sight alone...but my gaze kept drifting toward the chicken.

It reminded me of the chicken I'd been hunting earlier on...and I distinctly remembered threatening to turn it into chicken nanban!

"...This food looks delicious, it does..." Yae said. She couldn't help but salivate over the sight. She was right, but she was also in front of her children... I hoped she could keep her appetite in check, at least for appearance's sake.

"Don't worry, I've prepared all my mothers some food as well."

"Amazing! You are truly Lu-dono's progeny, you are."

As if sensing Yae's feelings, both Arcia and Lu revealed even more ginger pork and chicken nanban, enough for the whole table. They sure were considerate...

Well...I can't stare at this stuff forever. Time to eat.

"I'll start with the chicken. Yum..."

...I can't stop thinking about that chicken from earlier today...

I picked up my chopsticks and plucked a piece of the meat up. The golden-brown coating was the perfect contrast to the white meat. The way the tartar sauce mingled with the sweet vinegar made me want to keep on eating. The crispy texture was divine... I could feel the juices flowing from within the tender chunks. All the different flavors melded together in perfect, idealistic harmony.

Ahhh...I gotta have some rice with this... Mmmh!

“It’s amazing!”

I kept on devouring it. I savored the chicken, enjoyed the rice on the side, cleansed my palate with the pickled veggies, then washed it all down with the miso soup.

I’d been pretty hungry, so maybe the taste had been accentuated by that and the fact it’d been so long since I’d last had it... But still, it was insanely good. I couldn’t finish it all, though, since I had another dish to try.

“Let’s see here...”

I moved the chicken plate to the side and brought out the ginger pork. It looked really, really good.

Ginger pork was usually served one of two ways. Either it was pork fried with onions or thinly sliced, sautéed pork. This one was the former. It was cut quite finely, and the onions were cooked just the way my mother had done them.

I took a heaping helping of pork and onions between my chopsticks. I didn’t want to waste any of it, so I held a bowl of rice beneath it to catch any juices. Then, I plopped it into my mouth. It was delicious. I shoveled some rice into my mouth for good measure. The rice, onions, and pork all mingled in my mouth, spreading out the flavor more as I chewed. It was...about as good as the chicken.

Hm... It's a little stronger in flavor compared to my usual ginger pork... Just a little, but it's noticeable. Did Arcia make this one, maybe? Wait, no...I can't make judgments like that. It'll affect my final score! Strong or not, it tastes great. Even the cabbage is good... It's soaked up some of the ginger through the oils. Mfh... It's hard to compare this to the other one...

I glanced over and saw Arcia and Lu staring at me expectantly.

Ugh... They're both so good! But I have to choose! Agh! Hrmm... Hmm...

I took another bite of the chicken, then the pork. I compared the rice, the miso soup, and the pickled veggies. They were both good, but if I had to pick one...

All eyes were on me now.

...Don't think, feel. Whatever happens, happens!

"All right!"

"Have you decided?"

I nodded in response to Yumina's question. I decided to go with my gut. They were both good, so I'd simply say which one felt better.

"The ginger pork!"

"WHAAAAAAT?!"

When I gave my final answer, Arcia screamed to the high heavens.

Huh? Did I mess up?!

I looked over at Lu, who seemed so relieved she was patting her own chest. She was careful not to let Arcia see her do it, though.

So Lu made the pork, huh? Which means Arcia made the chicken?

"But why, father?! You always spoke so highly of it!"

"I what?"

“Oh...forget it. But why did you pick the pork over my chicken?”

I can't really explain it... It's just what felt right. I don't have a reason...

“Arcia. Why don't you try the pork for yourself and find out?”

“Hm?”

At Lu's urging, Arcia picked up some chopsticks and ate a piece of pork. She closed her eyes and slowly savored the taste as she chewed.

“It's delicious... But my chicken nanban is just as good...” Arcia mumbled, still unsure why the pork had won. Frankly, I still had no reason. It was just what felt right.

“Touya, what did you make of the pork?”

“Huh? I mean, it tasted great. It's a little...richer than usual, I guess? Stronger in taste?”

“Stronger? No...wait!”

As if suddenly realizing something, Arcia took another bite of pork. She then took a sip of the miso soup. What had she figured out?

“Salt!”

“Salt?”

“There's...just a tiny excess of salt... Not enough to upset the balance...but there's more salt than there should be.”

Huh? Really? I don't think I'd have noticed, to be honest... I knew it was a little stronger, but still...why?

“A workout... Ah!”

“Right. When you sweat, salt leaves the body. It's only natural your body would seek to restore what was lost. Even if he wasn't aware of it, his body would subtly crave saltier food. And that's why I added

just a little more salt, not enough to spoil the taste... But enough to win.”

Oh... So she was using my exercise today against me? I guess that makes sense. Even though I have an enhanced body, I still sweat. I still use the toilet. Granted, I don't sweat as much as I used to... I can actually toggle off stuff like that, but it's a pain in the ass... Plus, doing it toggles off a lot of my senses, like pain. That'd be bad! Either way, I did sweat a lot today...

The fact that Lu had picked up on that and conspired to make me unconsciously prefer her dish made me feel like I was being puppeteered.

“Ugh... You thought so far ahead... What a crushing defeat...” Arcia muttered as her shoulders slumped. Lu reached forward and took a bit of the chicken nanban.

“Oh! I see... Goodness... You're almost at my level. No wonder you were so confident in yourself... This is a wonderful dish, Arcia.”

“Mother...”

Lu smiled as she took her daughter's hand in hers. It was clear they both had a true love for cooking.

Whew... That should be that, right? No more turning my stomach in knots?

“...But.”

“Huh?”

The smile on Lu's face remained the same, but her eyes turned sharp.

...Did I hope too soon?

“Don't think I missed what you said earlier, young lady. You knew from the outset that Touya liked this dish, didn't you? That it was a dish he missed from his home, right?”

“Wh-Wh-Whatever do you mean, mother?” Arcia said as she awkwardly glanced away.

Now I get it... I must've enjoyed this in the future. Hmm... I don't know how long it'll be, but if Arcia ever makes me this in the future, I'll be sure to praise her immensely for it.

“You can't just use underhanded tricks like this, Arcia! That's not how we cook!”

“Huh? But Lu, didn't your salt trick rely on Arcia not knowing Touya had been sweating?” Elze's idle comment stopped Lu dead in her tracks. Elna started jabbing her mother with her elbow as if to tell her to be quiet, but Elze was fairly oblivious to what she'd done.

“...She's right, mother.”

“Wh-Wh-Whatever do you mean, daughter?” Lu said as she awkwardly glanced away.

...They really are mother and daughter.

“I'd have used more salt if I'd known about father's tired state! It's not my fault at all!”

“It is your fault! Your fault for not thinking ahead far enough!”

The two of them began bickering. Everyone ignored it and continued eating their food.

“They get along well.”

“I...suppose they do?”

I wasn't sure if it was exactly as Sue described, but it was certainly something. All things considered, their parent-child relationship wasn't so bad.

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“How frustrating! Mother outsmarted me yet again!”

“I think it’s more that you were just careless, Arcy.”

It was the same night Arcia had arrived. The kids were all dressed in pajamas, gathered in one of the castle rooms. Frei simply sighed at Arcia, who was pummeling some cushions to work out her stress. As if to change the subject, Quun turned to Elna and Linne.

“Tell me, you two. Are you certain it was Arcia who was in front of you when the impact happened?”

“Mhm. When the core exploded, Arcia protected us from it.”

After hearing Linne speak, Quun was convinced of her hypothesis. It was all but guaranteed. Her siblings were appearing in this world based on how far away from the core they were when the flash occurred.

“So, Arcia...who was in front of you?”

“Er... It was so bright I closed my eyes... But I think Yoshino was the closest to me...”

“Yoshino? I’m sure she’ll be fine, then... She has **[Teleport]**, so as long as she doesn’t take any detours...”

Yoshino was Sakura’s daughter, so she could use the same Null spell. Unlike **[Gate]**, **[Teleport]** could take the caster anywhere so long as they had the distance calculations right in their head. It required a considerable amount of magical power to cast, but Yoshino’s mana reserves were deep enough to allow her to go to Brunhild multiple times even from the furthest edge of the world. If there was any real issue, it was the girl’s personality. Yoshino was a moody girl. She didn’t like doing things she didn’t like to do. She only did what she felt like doing. She was the kind of girl who’d go, “I should see my family...but maybe it can wait...”

She loved new and interesting things, and would often pursue them with no hesitation. But she also got very bored, very easily. Her

storage card was a graveyard for hobbies she quickly grew tired of. In other words, she had a capricious nature.

Quun knew that Yoshino was unlikely to come straight to Brunhild even after being sent to the past.

“If we’re not careful, Yakumo’ll arrive before she does.”

“What do you mean? Is it bad if Yakumo comes first?”

Quun’s words confused Elna, but Linne could only chuckle.

“Think about it. If Yoshino just shows up casually after Yakumo does, she’ll probably have a lot of random junk she picked up.”

“Oh... Yakumo’ll definitely give her a serious lecture again...” Elna smiled wryly as she pictured the scene she’d seen a few times before.

Yakumo was the picture of seriousness. She was dutiful to a fault. But Yoshino? She was lackadaisical and relaxed to the extreme. The two were polar opposites. They weren’t on bad terms or anything, but it felt simply natural for Yakumo to constantly chastise Yoshino.

“Yoshino... You better hurry back before Yakumo talks your ears off...” Frei muttered quietly to a sister she didn’t even know had arrived yet. She didn’t really care if Yakumo gave Yoshino a stern talking to, but she could probably do without the headache.

Though she would be more inclined to help her whimsical sister if the girl brought her an interesting weapon from her travels...

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“Achoo!” Yakumo suddenly sneezed in a manner not quite unlike that of an old man.

“Mnh... Someone must be talking about me...” she mumbled and rubbed her nose as she continued through the town. She was in the

nation of Orphen. It was the western counterpart of Eashen, her mother's homeland.

Eashen was in the far east, while Orphen was in the far west. Yakumo had never been to Orphen before, but the place was geographically similar to her mother's home. Still, she'd been forced to get a ship from Lassei to reach the island, as she had no memories of Orphen through which to use **[Gate]**.

She'd come here in search of a peculiar golden powder she'd discovered in Isengard. It was a powder rumored to be made from the Puretree's branches. One effective against a particular illness ravaging Isengard. An illness that caused fever, emaciation...and eventually death... The most terrifying thing about the affliction was that it caused a golden flower to bloom from the infected's head... A flower that turned them into walking corpses.

Those who knew the truth were aware that it wasn't a disease at all. It was a method once employed by the wicked god to turn humans into mutated monsters. Most people didn't know this, however, so they believed it was a disease.

The wicked god had been defeated, so any current cases of the sickness were only those who had been infected in the past. It was no longer an active threat. Unfortunately, it wasn't so easy to quell such long-held anxieties.

If this golden powder was just a simple scam, Yakumo wouldn't have come all this way. She would've reported it to the nearby guild or gotten Isengard's authorities involved. But there was something off about it. The powder she'd recovered gave her an immense feeling of dread.

After following various clues, the trail brought young Yakumo to the nation of Orphen. It was a land culturally similar to Eashen. They wore garbs not unlike kimonos and their homes were built of wood

and brick, but the streets still bustled with magical glowing stones and Golems, things that would seem out of place in the far east.

If Yakumo's father had been here, he would have recognized the more developed architecture. It might have reminded him of Japan's Meiji and Taisho eras. The swordsmen and Golems in the streets called to mind the images of samurai. They even wielded katanas.

That worked to Yakumo's advantage. Though she stood out in many nations around the world, here she looked like any other Orphenese citizen.

She marched straight down the main street. It was her first time here, but she had a map on her phone that displayed her surroundings. Her destination was a dilapidated building on the outskirts of town. The golden substance was said to be sold by a peculiar dealer who lived there. She had no real plan. She simply intended to attack him, take him into custody, and make him talk. In that straightforward regard, Yakumo was much like her mother.

The abandoned building on the outskirts of town used to be some kind of production facility. She proceeded through it, but couldn't sense anything in the way of human presence at all. She wondered if they'd been tipped off and escaped...but then something shot out of the darkness on the second floor.

"Huh?!"

Yakumo ducked and jumped back as three knives embedded in the floor where she'd been standing. The young girl drew the sword at her waist, casting her gaze up toward the dim space the knives had come from.

"...Who are you? You're not one of my regulars... Your eyes are too lively...your gait too vigorous..."

Her assailant emerged from the dark, wearing a peculiar helmet. The helmet was spherical in shape. It had round peepholes attached to

the sides with iron bars crossed along them. Pipe-like tubing came from the helmet and connected to a tank on the person's back. It was a very odd sight, overall.

If Yakumo's father were here, he might have remarked that whatever this individual was wearing, it looked pretty much like a diving suit.

At first, Yakumo thought her enemy might be a Golem, but it was clear upon closer inspection that it was a human being in a heavy clunking outfit.

"You are the one spreading the golden drug, you ar— Er...aren't you?"

"That I am. And what are you? A lapdog of Orphen? Come to sniff me out and put me down on orders of your nation? Your country's swifter than I expected."

Her enemy had made a mistake in identifying her, but Yakumo decided not to correct him. It was more convenient that way.

"What is the truth behind your medicine? It isn't just fraud, is it? There's more to it."

"Hoh. You're rather astute, aren't you? I suppose it's something of a screening process. It helps us identify who has the right aptitude and who doesn't."

Yakumo had no idea what her attacker meant. She wasn't sure how medicine could screen for people in that way. Therefore, she decided to get her answers directly.

"[Gate]."

"Mfh!"

Yakumo opened a portal right next to the person in the diving suit, but found her sudden strike blocked by a hatchet pulled out from her enemy's waist.

“Nh!”

The two of them jumped away from each other.

Yakumo was completely taken aback. Her blade was composed of phrasium. It was forged by her father. It was her most precious possession... And yet, somehow, her enemy had blocked such a mighty blade with naught but a tiny hatchet.

The individual in the diving suit seemed just as surprised by the clash.

“...Your weapon actually clashed with my Deep Blue...?” the person mumbled and glanced at the hatchet in their hand, which was now glowing a metallic azure.

Yakumo saw her chance, so she took it. She closed the distance in the blink of an eye, slashing at her enemy.



“Hwah!”

The tip of her sword cleanly sliced through a pipe near the suit’s neck. A second later, a golden mist began spewing forth from the pipe, dispersing around the area. Yakumo, sensing something amiss, jumped back immediately.

“Ack! Damn it... I’ll have to retreat for now... Feel free to tell Orphen’s dragon emperor that we’re done here for now... But mark my words...we wicked devout will return the world to how it should be! How it was meant to be!”

“Wicked devout? Wait, you cannot mean... Wait, you mustn’t—!”

Before Yakumo could finish shouting, her enemy dove into the ground as if it were water...and then they were gone.

It was likely a form of teleportation magic. Wherever her foe was now, it wasn’t here.

“The wicked devout... Grandmother Tokie was right to have a bad feeling, she was...” Yakumo’s voice seemed troubled. She silently sheathed her beloved blade and let out a heavy breath.

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“Man...I’m beat...”

Putting the ruckus with Arcia’s arrival aside, the theme park tour ended without a hitch. I’d figured out a lot of things that would work for Brunhild’s own theme park, and stuff that I felt wouldn’t work...but I wasn’t sure if I wanted to impart this level of exhaustion to all the dads of the world. Still, seeing the look of joy on the faces of my kids didn’t really give me much of a choice in the matter.

Arcia’s arrival meant making yet another excuse to the castle staff, but I’d had the foresight to warn everyone in advance, so it wasn’t really questioned. When she got back to the castle, she headed

straight to the kitchen to help out our head cook, Crea. We ended up having a great dinner, but I wound up with a stomachache after because our newest arrival ended up feeding me dish after dish.

I thanked Prince Robert for bringing my daughter over, and after I let him sit in for dinner, I sent him back home to Panaches through a **[Gate]**. I couldn't help but feel sorry for him this time, after all.

With Arcia now here, that meant more than half of my kids were now in Brunhild... Quun, Frei, Arcia, Elna, and Linne.

The only ones left to show up were Yae's, Sue's, Sakura's, and Yumina's... Though Yae's daughter, Yakumo, was technically here already.

Hm... I wonder where she is right now?

Afterword

The kids sure are popping up fast, huh? When I was writing this online, it felt a lot better paced... I spent a lot of time writing this arc, actually. But now that it's all piled up in one book, it feels like it happened so fast. I have to admit my pacing here isn't the best, so let me apologize for the sudden influx of new characters.

The kids are going to keep having a major role, so I hope you've been enjoying them.

Anyway, I don't have much space to work with here, so let me give my thanks! Eiji Usatsuka, thank you. You've designed five kids for this volume, and you did great.

Tomofumi Ogasawara, thanks for designing the green crown. She's a feminine Gollem, and I like the style.

I'd like to thank K and the Hobby Japan editorial department, along with everyone involved with the publication process.

Oh, and, naturally, I'd like to thank my readers, along with everyone who follows my work on Shousetsuka ni Narou.

Patora Fuyuhara

Bonus Short Stories

The Five Princesses

I'm a Heavenly Beast, and my name is Kohaku. As one of the guardians of Brunhild, I take the form of a magnificent white tiger and stand by the side of my grand duke. Recently, however, Brunhild's castle has become a fair bit noisier. That's due to the arrival of various children, my lord's daughters from some far-flung future.

"Oh, Kohaku. How are you?"

"Fine thank you, Princess."

I was awoken from one of my couch-bound catnaps by Quun. She was the third princess of Brunhild, as far as I understood it. The daughter of my lord and Lady Leen. She always walked with a strange little Gollem named Parla in tow. Frankly, I felt a little uneasy around her... She was a princess, yet she spent most of her time in Babylon studying under that frightening doctor.

"Good morning, Kohaku."

"Yo, Kohaku! Morning!"

"Good morning to you, Princesses."

Lady Elze's daughter, Elna, and Lady Linze's daughter, Linne, both greeted me in their own ways. The two of them resembled their respective mothers, but their personalities couldn't be further apart. Perhaps it was because their mothers were twins, but they were rarely seen apart from one another. And when they walked around with their mothers, the four of them looked like sisters. It was a rather entertaining sight.

"Morning, Kohaku..."

"Good morning. Did you remember to wash your face?"

“...Oh, I forgot...”

Lady Hilde’s daughter, Frei, looked over at me with very sleepy eyes. At my words, she turned on her heel and headed straight to the washroom. Her mother was a stoic and earnest type, but this girl was far more casual and carefree. Lady Hilde was very much a morning person, but that couldn’t be further from the truth when it came to Frei. That trait of hers was closer to her father’s, really. And just like her father, she still pushed herself to get up in the morning to do what she needed to do.

I decided to head toward the kitchen to get my breakfast when I suddenly saw my fellow Heavenly Beasts in the hallway. Kougyoku, Sango, Kokuyou, and Luli were all very timidly peeking into the kitchen...and I had a sinking feeling as to why.

“Are they at it again?”

“They sure are.”

Kokuyou promptly answered my question. I peeked into the kitchen along with all the others.

Lady Lucia was glaring at her daughter, Arcia, who glared right back.

“It’s cold this morning! Father would be better off having a spicy ginger pork soup with Napa cabbage! We need to use a hearty stock!”

“That might be good if you’re a child, Arcia, but your father ate a great deal at the gathering in Belfast last night. We’ll be making him a more watery consommé with regular cabbage, and that’s that.”

“Grrrrrrh!”

I couldn’t help but sigh.

“The two of them really can’t help but butt heads, can they?”

“You, of all people, dare say that, Kohaku?”

“Right? You and Luli butt heads just like that all the time.”

Both Luli and I moved to protest, but we simply sighed and stopped speaking. I was glad the subject was promptly dropped, though. I didn’t want to get roped into Luli hassling me again. I turned back to the kitchen and saw Lady Lucia hard at work on the soup, while Arcia was making something else. The two of them bickered, but thankfully, they never lingered long on it. Arcia was clearly just after her mother’s approval, anyway. If it was a real point of contention, then my lord would’ve stopped it by now.

“They really are like you two, you know.”

“They are not!”

“They are not!”

Luli and I were in full agreement on one thing, at least. We weren’t bickerers!

Mothers & Daughters

“Hup!”

“That’s right, keep it up!”

“Now look... Loop up through the bottom, see?”

“Oh! I got it!”

Elze and Linne were training on the field while Linze and Elna were knitting together off to the side. One might think the two were matched up with the wrong daughter, but things seemed fairly natural. The mothers were twin sisters, after all, so it stood to reason that they’d be very close with each other’s daughters.

When the training finally ended, Linne ran over to Linze and Elze came over to admire Elna’s knitting. It was quite the tender sight.

“Hm... I wonder about this situation, I do...”

“Ack! Where’d you come from?!”

I was looking over at Elze and the others with a smile on my face when Yae suddenly appeared by me out of nowhere. Behind her stood a grinning Hilde and a mostly confused-looking Frei.

Crap... They caught me looking on all sentimental-like!

Frei spoke up, saying something unintentionally mean-spirited.

“What’s the big deal? Father looks at us like that from afar all the time in the future. Sometimes, he even sniffles and cries.”

“What?!”

“He’s always worried about us getting married or leaving the castle, so he quietly keeps an eye on us while fussing to himself. It’s pretty lame.”

Man... I clearly have some issues, huh?

I tried to imagine giving my daughters away at the altar, but the thought was just too much for me to handle.

“Ghhh!”

“Good grief... That is just how our husband is, it is... How regrettable.”

“He’s getting ahead of himself, if you ask me.”

My wives couldn’t possibly understand the feeling that burned in my chest... Like it or not, it was something I could only share with Ende... But then I reconsidered, since Allis apparently had a thing for my son...and I didn’t want to invite the guy’s ire so early in the day.

“My daughter will be subjected to this as well, she will...”

“Maybe we should marry her off soon so you can stop worrying.”

“Huh?! But she’s not even born yet, technically! Gimme a break!”

Like hell was I going to let that happen... Our girls were barely women!

"The others and I are seventeen, we are. Sue-dono is thirteen, she is. Is that not soon enough for you?"

Ack! Stop using that against me! That's not my fault! Ugh... Now I know how the overlord feels about Sakura... This is the worst... Maybe I should treat the poor sap a little better next time I see him.

"I wish my daughter would come here soon, I do..."

"Don't worry so hard. She'll come when she's ready."

"I am glad that you and Elze-dono can spend time with your daughters, Hilde-dono, but I must confess that I am jealous, I am."

Hilde seemed a bit bewildered by Yae's dejected response, so Frei butted in to save the day.

"Uhm... You're my mother too, you know?! Why not train with me?"

Yae's eyes suddenly went wide, a little smile overtaking her expression as she reached down to pat the girl on the head.

"You are a lovely girl, Frei."

"He he he... Thanks..."

"Very well, then! Linne, Frei! I will fight you, I will! Have at thee!"

"H-Huh?! But... I don't wanna train too haaaaard!"

Before Frei could voice further complaints, Yae grabbed her by the hand and bolted off toward Elze and the others.

"Glad to see her mood improve."

"Indeed. It doesn't matter who gave birth to whom. We're all family here."

Seeing all my wives and daughters get along so well really swelled my heart up with pride. I couldn't help but smile...

But it was still too soon for my daughters to get married. I knew that for a fact.

Crafting Games

I've been playing a ton of video games lately. Partly because of the global situation. That's right, I've cast my beloved board games aside to play stuff on my TV. It's been fun since I can play them alone, and I can basically play them anytime I want. Sometimes I find myself up at odd hours in the morning just gaming... It's hard to stop playing when you can tell yourself you'll just do one more thing...

Recently, I've been super into a game called *Dragon Quest Builders 2*. It's a crafting and building type of game, kind of like Minecraft. You might be thinking I'm late to the party, but this is actually my second time playing it. I originally bought the game for the Nintendo Switch, and I finished it back then. But now I've bought the PS4 version, so I started all over from scratch. I finished the story again, so I've just been building freely in Terra Incognita mode. I've just been building stuff and breaking stuff... Building stuff and breaking stuff... Over and over again.

The first sandbox building game I ever played was the famous Minecraft, but the first time I played it, I had no idea what was going on. When I realized nighttime was dangerous, I dug a hole in a cliff and hid between the rocks like a caveman. Unlike Dragon Quest Builders, Minecraft doesn't really have a plot, so you can do whatever you want from the start. But there's a serious risk there because new players have no real sense of direction.

I figured... Okay, I'll build a house! So I managed to cobble together an ugly-looking one out of dirt and wood. Then I got wool from sheep, managed to make myself a bed...and bam, the night was no longer scary. I tilled the soil, made fields to grow food in... I dug through mountains for ore to make weapons and tools. It was all

pretty simple stuff. Felt awfully repetitive, but I just couldn't stop myself from doing it. Maybe I just have the kind of personality that's suited to it.

I deduced that the best ore must be deep underground, so I just started digging down in a straight line...only to hit an open space and fall to my death. I've got some good early memories of accidentally digging too deep and dying in the magma below. I've been watching a ton of Minecraft videos lately and some of the ideas are really astounding. It makes me wonder how people even thought of crafting this stuff... There are ways people have found to express themselves that I never thought possible.

There were even some videos that explained how to build cool stuff in step-by-step processes, so I ended up copying them. It can be a bit hard to just use your imagination, so that came in handy. But I think it's vital for creators, and people in general, to exercise their imaginations. That's why I'm going to go back to my PS4 and learn to expand my horizons right now. For my job, that is. It's important.



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In Another World With My Smartphone: Volume 23

by Patora Fuyuhara

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